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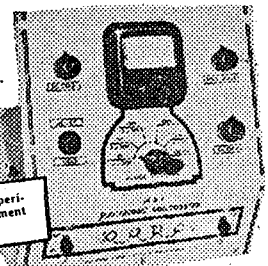

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STARTLING stories

Vol. 31, No. 1 A THRILLING PUBLICATION October, 1953

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THE WHITE WIDOWS . . . . . **Sam Merwin, Jr.** 12
He stumbled onto a new version of the battle of the sexes, and there wasn't a battle-axe among the beauties he fought

A Complete Novelet

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N. L. PINES, Publisher FANNY ELLSWORTH, Executive Editor
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How I foxed the Navy

by Arthur Godfrey

The Navy almost scuttled me. I shudder to think of it. My crazy career could have ended right there. Who knows, I might still be bumming Chesterfields instead of selling them.

To be scuttled by the Navy you've either got to do something wrong or neglect to do something right. They've got you both ways. For my part, I neglected to finish high school.

Ordinarily, a man can get along without a high school diploma. Plenty of men have. But not in the Navy. At least not in the U. S. Navy Materiel School at Bellevue, D. C., back in 1929. In those days a bluejacket had to have a mind like Einstein's. And I didn't.

"Godfrey," said the lieutenant a few days after I'd checked in, "either you learn mathematics and learn it *fast* or out you go. I'll give you six weeks." This, I figured, was it. For a guy who had to take off his shoes to count above ten, it was an impossible assignment.

I was ready to turn in my bell-bottoms. But an ad in a magazine stopped me. Here, it said, is your chance to get special training in almost any subject—mathematics included. I hopped on it. Within a week I was enrolled with the International Correspondence Schools studying algebra, geometry and trig for all I was worth.

Came week-end liberty, I studied. Came a holiday, I studied. Came the end of the six weeks, I was top man in the class. Within six weeks I had mastered two years of high school math, thanks to the training I'd gotten.

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- ☐ Auto Body Rebuilding and Refinishing
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- ☐ Aircraft Engine Mechanic
- ☐ Airplane Drafting

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- ☐ Radio Servicing—FM
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- ☐ Telephone Work

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A Science Fiction Department Featuring Letters from Readers

SCIENCE-FICTION writers are not the only people concerned with the future. Big business and government, for their own reasons, are very much concerned with trends and developments ahead and are constantly making surveys and polls and forecasts which they hope will give them some hints as to future policies. One of the most enlightening things you, as a concerned citizen, can do, is to read the financial pages of the newspapers where the most astonishing information is packaged. A cynical and brilliant friend of mine (an engineer, by the way) always insisted that these were the only pages in a newspaper worth reading. "The front pages are filled with propaganda," he used to mutter, "which businessmen are too smart to believe. When they want the truth they read the financial pages in the back."

And verily, if you make comparisons sometimes, you will find STARTLING differences between the words of some bigshot spouting for the front page and the actual things that are happening in the industrial and financial world.

Having inadvertently brushed up against a Wall Street man, we found ourselves on several mailing lists and are now collecting literature urging us to become independently wealthy by investing in stocks and bonds. The only catch to this generous proposal is the fact that it seems one has to have money to make money—to buy the stocks and bonds in the first place. This is such a remote possibility that it has never caused us any sleepless nights. In the meantime we are collecting some fascinating information, for the literature of the stock brokers is literally loaded.

We don't mean piddling items like: if you had invested $1,000 in International Business Machines in 1921, it would be worth $125,000 today. This doesn't bother us because you can't buy nearly as much today for $125,000 as you could for $1,000 in 1921. There are more important things. For example, we learn that the government recently appointed a committee of appraisers, headed by William S. Paley, chairman of the board of the Columbia Broadcasting System, to polish up the crystal ball and take a look into the future. What will this country be like in 1975, the government wanted to know.

Well, it's going to be different, the committee reported. Here are the highlights of their guesses:

Population will hit 193 million—a gain of 42 million.

There will be 75 million telephones in the U. S. (Still only one telephone for every 2½ persons.)

Living standards will be higher. People will have more things to make their lives more comfortable.

Working hours will be shorter—30 to 34 hours a week. There will be more leisure for all, longer vacations and more tourist travel.

We will produce 40% more gadgets, electrical appliances and other labor-saving devices.

Synthetics, plastics and chemicals will continue to boom, also the new fields of light metals and alloys, and electronics. One danger here; supplies may run short and it is indicated that new sources will have to be found.

Wallace's once-visionary goal of 60 mil-

(Please turn to page 8)

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These great minds were Rosicrucians . . .

WHAT SECRET POWER DID THEY POSSESS?

Benjamin Franklin

Isaac Newton

Francis Bacon

Why were these men great?

How does anyone — man or woman — achieve greatness? Is it not by mastery of the powers within ourselves?

Know the mysterious world within you! Attune yourself to the wisdom of the ages! Grasp the inner power of your mind! Learn the secrets of a full and peaceful life!

Benjamin Franklin, statesman and inventor . . . Isaac Newton, discoverer of the Law of Gravitation . . . Francis Bacon, philosopher and scientist . . . like many other learned and great men and women . . . were Rosicrucians. The Rosicrucians (NOT a religious organization) have been in existence for centuries. Today, headquarters of the Rosicrucians send over seven million pieces of mail annually to all parts of the world.

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lion jobs will be obsolete—the committee expects an actual 79 million people gainfully employed, with unemployment held to two and a half million.

The automobile industry will stay in business, keeping more than 65 million passenger cars on the road and 20 million trucks.

Industry expects to continue its expansion, spending 50% more each year on plants and machinery.

The government will spend 50% more than it is now doing on public works.

More electricity will be used—350% more. More metals will be needed: 43% more copper, 53% more lead, 39% more zinc.

We will have a permanent standing army of 4,000,000 men.

New homes and apartments will be constructed at the rate of about 1,500,000 units a year.

We will need 100,000 new railroad cars a year.

This wholly optimistic report forecasts a general doubling of industrial activity for the United States in the next thirty years, with a corresponding improvement in the status of the general citizen and in his living standard. We are neither defending nor criticizing it. We offer it only for a view of what the hard-headed people of our world are thinking, as contrasted with the visionaries. The intriguing thing about this slightly mad planet is that so often the realists and the poets travel down different paths to the same destination.

ETHERGRAMS

Any resemblance between the blood spilled in these columns and ketchup is more than accidental. It seems to have been planned that way.

DIAMONDS IN THE ROUGH
by Wallace Platts

Egad Sam: Run for the hills the dam must have burst. We're knee-deep in fems, bems, and Fanettes. I know a lot of unusual things come out in the spring, but this is too much. I wonder if I can take a moment here for a few words in answer to Miss Masterson's letter? She worries about the scarcity of REAL men, has she ever wondered if there wasn't a shortage of real women? I mean one who is a WOMAN, which necessitates being a little more than being merely a female. It is said kind seeks out its own kind, I imagine a REAL woman could find a man of equal caliber even today. And look at all the bachelors, very probably men of ideals and will-power who wouldn't compromise on an inferior grade of material. A lot of foreign girls seem to be snatching off our best young men, which seems to me should provide a little food for thought for the home-grown product. And shame on her for stealing my analogy on Sabertooths and pussy-cats. Originality, dots der stuff.

Now to the 'Thursday Afternoon Bem, Fem, Sewing and Rocket Society'. Are they afraid they couldn't hold their own in a mixed group? The slight difference in the points of view in a mixed group provide much of the interest and discussion that is vital if the group is to last long. But I say let them go, they'll only become stagnant and dull unless they use this letter column, or something equivalent, as a battlefield to provide the outside (male) stimulus they'll have to have to keep sharp. Even a diamond is dull unless it is rubbed against something that resists it.

Did you notice how many gals deliberately misunderstood your references to henparties and single-sexed SF groups, and used it as an excuse to write and say the same things all over again?

I don't think dumpy is a good way to describe women, seems to me potty would be better. After all, look at the profits of the two-way stretch industry.

And I notice your letters are fifty-fifty male and female. Do you honestly think half your readers are female? And half your mail isn't from women either is it? Then why, Sam?

I hardy imagine this will earn me a halo, but I'll settle for a couple of horns. Sincerely, your NOGOODNICK Friend.—*U. S. S. MAINSTAY AM-261 c/o Fleet Post Office, San Francisco, California.*

It's a good thing you're safely on a ship, pal. But is it noble to leave me here to face the music? I appreciate the support—and I need it—but I wish it weren't such long-distance support. When is your hitch over?

THE MAD MARTIAN MADE
by MariAn Cox

Dear Sam: Don't you just hate me? All those lovely gals calling you names, and it's all my fault. I apologize, Sam. Didn't mean to make you stick your neck out that far.

(Continued on page 119)

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THOUSANDS NOW PLAY

who never thought they could!

"Opened Door to Popularity"

"I was able to play many pieces in a short time. Family and friends certainly surprised. Course opened door to popularity, wider circle of friends. Recently I entered amateur contest—won First Prize."—*Peter H. Kozyra, Manitoba, Canada*

Course Inspires Music Circle

Shown above is Miss Mildred Cade, of Houston, Texas. She and a number of her friends are so enthusiastic about the U. S. School of Music's quick-easy way of learning that they've ALL taken it up.

Plays Banjo in a Short Time

"Enjoy your lessons for the Tenor Banjo; am progressing rapidly. Lessons are so simple, anyone can understand; yet so thorough I have learned to play by note in little more than a month!" — *Andrew Schneider, Hanna, Wyoming.*

"Can't Thank Your School Enough"

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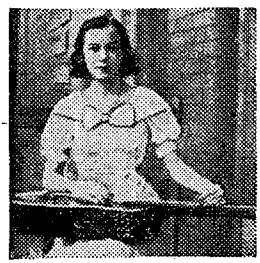

Learns Faster Without Teacher

"I have no special talent — but thanks to you I play my guitar better than many who have taken lessons from teachers longer, and naturally at higher cost." — *Myrella-Muquette Saint Andre, Montreal, Canada.*

Now a Famous Orchestra Leader

"I got my start in music with a U. S. School Course. How easy it is to learn to read notes, play an instrument, this 'teach-yourself' way! I've enrolled my two daughters." — *Lawrence Welk.*

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900,000 Students!

The result? Over 900,000 men and women have taken up music at home this simple, A-B-C way. Now, all over the world, enthusiastic music-lovers are enjoying the thrilling satisfaction of creating their own music. They have found the key to good times, and popularity.

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NOTICE

Please don't confuse our method with any systems claiming to teach "without music" or "by ear." We teach you easily and quickly to play *real music*, any music by standard notes—not by any trick or number system.

U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC, Studio C25910
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☐ I do ☐ I do not — have instrument now.

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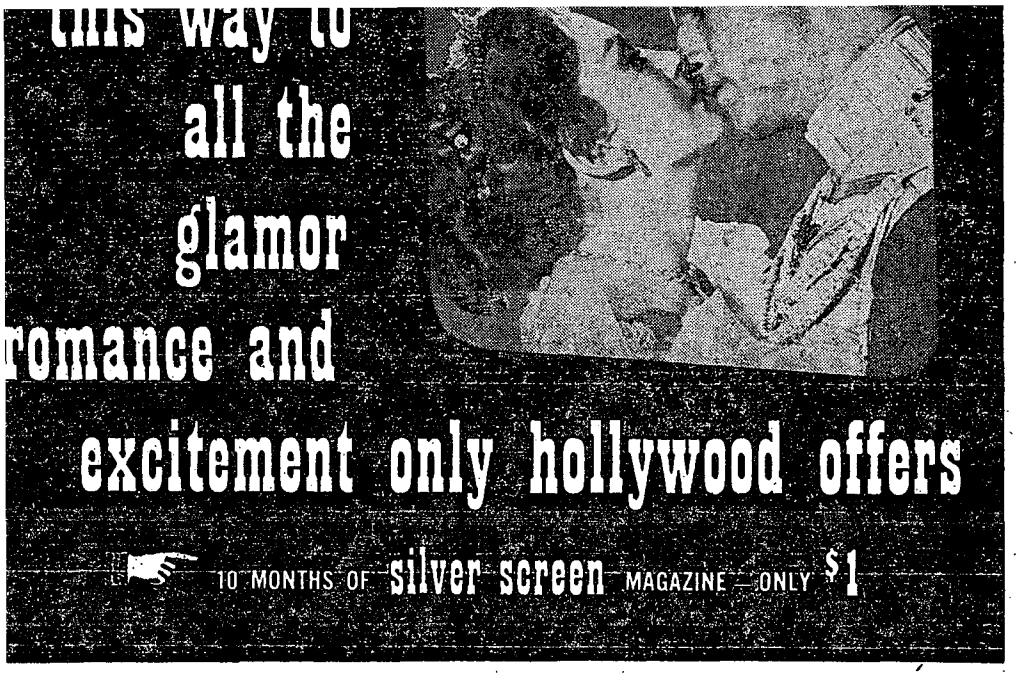

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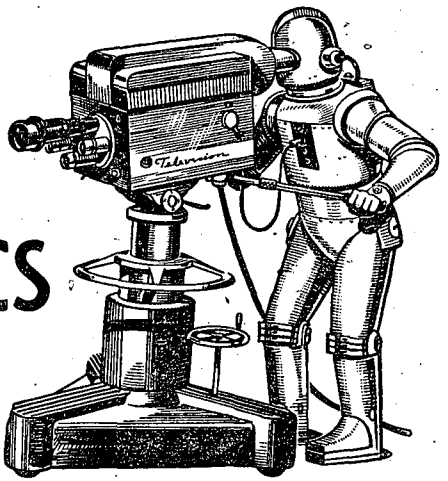
Adventures in Science

VIDEO-TECHNICS

by PAT JONES



CLOSEST thing to time travel we've yet seen is CBS-TV's absorbing Sunday feature, "Adventure." Drawing on the past, as it often must, it carries the viewer back to prehistoric times when the world was young and science was just a gleam in Mother Nature's eye. Just as often it catapults him to the day after tomorrow with its up-to-date reporting of achievements in the sciences.

Calling upon the vast resources of the American Museum of Natural History and the Hayden Planetarium it is dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge. Avoiding a pedantic format it dramatizes the accomplishments of the world's outstanding men and women of science. To a dubious critic who suggested that without a romance angle, a TV show is bound to drag, Dr. Albert E. Parr, distinguished marine biologist and Director of the American Museum, pointed out, "We *do* have the mating dance of the grouse or a love match between two octopi."

It might be said that "Adventure" has the biggest budget of any show on TV. More than a thousand persons are working for the Museum on research projects which will be available to the show. Artists and craftsmen who decorate the Museum's exhibition halls may be called upon for scale models of prehistoric monsters or blown-up models of microscopic algae. More than a thousand stories are on tap for future presentations, and as for props, there are some forty-million-dollars' worth available at all times.

The vaulted halls of the Museum serve as a setting for the "stars" of the show, and have housed such attractions as the asteroid belt between Jupiter and Mars, the 543-carat Star of India sapphire, and a volcano. Looking at the vast array, producer Perry Wolff observed, "At least we have no casting problem."

Newsman Charles Collingwood, a new kind of emcee it may be noted, has some special qualifications for chinning with the world's leading scientists. Along with liberal doses of charm, he also studied at Oxford University as a Rhodes scholar. It came as no surprise to him that "by actual count, nearly 250,000,000 persons visited the museum last year—and that was more than the gate at Yankee Stadium. With TV, the Museum may have even more guests, but all seated comfortably in their living rooms."

On one of the first shows viewers took the trip through space which has long been one of the Museum's feature attractions. The fabulous Zeiss Projector made its TV debut, with staff astronomer Joseph Chamberlain to point out the solar system's points of interest. "To a scientist the sun is the source of all adventure." There may be, for some of you veteran science *and* fiction lovers, nothing new in some of the facts presented. We're sure, however, that the stimulating reporting and dramatic camerawork—as focused on the tibia of an ancient fossil or a hundred-carat ruby—will bring you adventure of a kind you'll enjoy.

Look forward to televised events such as the annual symposium on space travel which has been an annual feature at the Planetarium. If the technical difficulties can be worked out, you may be on the next ship to tomorrow. See you there!

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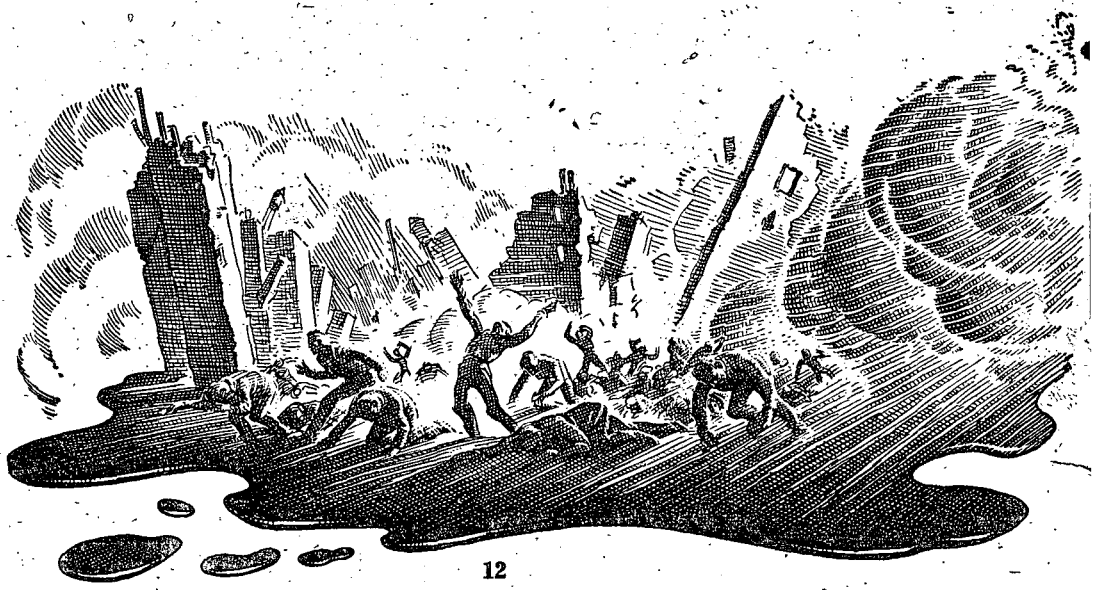
THE WHITE WIDOWS

I

THE package was waiting for him when he got home from the laboratory. It sat on the hall table of the red brick house in which he lived, halfway between Huntington Avenue and the Fenway. Neatly wrapped in brown paper and twine, the package looked as if it might contain a volume of notebook size.

That was the whole trouble as far as Larry Finlay was concerned—it *did* contain a volume of notebook size. The volume held the thesis on which he had worked for eighteen back-breaking months—and which he had sent off to the University two weeks earlier, blessed with high hopes

A Novel by SAM MERWIN, JR.



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He stumbled onto a new version of the battle of the sexes—and there wasn't a battle-axe among the beauties he fought . . .

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of acceptance toward a Ph. D.

Two weeks! It seemed incredible to him that his thesis should have been read so quickly, much less weighed and found wanting. Numbly he picked it up and thought it unpleasantly polite of the University officials to pay out postage for its return. So confident had he been of its acceptance that he had not bothered to include return postage.

The stuffed shirts at the University had kissed him off for exactly thirty-three cents' worth of stamps!

Without any recollection of having climbed the stairs, Larry found himself in his third-floor-front apartment, standing in the semi-circular bay of the front window, still holding the package. He seriously debated hurling it through the glass before him into the street. Then, a trifle unsteadily, he turned back to the dark mission table in the center of the room and carefully untied the knots in the string around it.

There was a note inside, a brief impersonal typewritten message on three-by-five paper beneath the University crest. It read:

> We regret to inform you that on the basis of the thesis you have submitted to us we do not consider you eligible for a Doctor of Physics degree from this university. Therefore, regretfully, we are returning your thesis to you, and terminating your candidacy for the degree.

It was signed with an illegible scrawl beneath which the stenographer had typed the name of a faceless assistant professor in the Department of Biology. That was all—that and the thirty-three cents in stamps, now cancelled, that had brought it back to him through the U.S. mails.

He looked groggily at the leatherette cover, on which had been pasted the title —*A New Approach to the Problem of Haemophilia*. Perhaps he should have called it *Mother's Blood*—or *Heritage of Death*—or something more commercial. Or perhaps he should have stood in bed. With this thought he dropped the rejected thesis on the table and flung himself face down on the davenport that served as his bed at night.

He was still lying there, tasting the enervating flat wine of failure, when Mrs. Bemis, the landlady, knocked on his door and called, "Why don't you answer the phone, Mr. Finlay? I know you're there—I heard you come in. Didn't you hear me shouting my lungs out?"

Larry pulled himself together, rolled over and sat up. "Sorry, Mrs. Bemis," he called back. "I must have dozed off. Coming."

Mrs. Bemis was a leathery, white-haired little widow woman who unloaded her large and unsatisfied maternal instinct on those of her lodgers who were not too far behind in their rent. She fussed over Larry all the way down to the ground floor, telling him it wasn't right for a young man like him to work so hard, that he ought to take things easier, that there was no sense in getting anywhere in the world if you were too worn-out to enjoy it.

"Relax," he told her with what he hoped was a smile, "I don't seem to be getting much of anywhere, Mrs. Bemis." With that he picked the phone up from the hall table and said, "Hello?"

IT WAS Ned Tolman, calling from the *Gazette* City Room, where he passed five out of every seven days toiling behind a typewriter in the rewrite battery. He said, "Hey, microbe hunter, how about a little foregathering this evening? You ought to have a couple of moments free since that opus of yours is finally finished."

Larry gave it to him straight. He said, "The opus just came back, Ned. They don't seem to want any part of it."

There was silence, during which Larry could hear in the background someone frantically shouting, "Boy! Boy—get your tail out of a sling." Then Ned said, "But you only just sent it to them. I thought they took months to make up their minds about these things."

"Not about this one, it seems," Larry told him.

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"All the more reason to shake yourself loose then," said the newspaperman. "Look, I know a little place in the North End where the lasagna is out of this world—and the veal parmegiano out of this universe. Why don't you pick up Ida and meet me there in an hour?"

"Sorry, Ned," Larry replied. "I don't feel very gay right now."

Tolman spent the next five minutes in argument, wheedling, cajoling and finally threatened blackmail—but finally gave up. Larry wanted to see his best friend—he wanted to see Ida, who was more than friend—but he didn't want to see them tonight. When he finally managed to hang up the receiver he traipsed wearily back up the stairs to his rooms.

He didn't lie down again. Instead he sat on the window seat and smoked and tried to figure out where he could have gone wrong. Perhaps, he thought, his mistake lay in having tackled an approach that was too radical, a trail too untrodden for the academic mind.

Virtually all efforts to check the bleeding of haemophiliacs to date have consisted of direct study of and efforts to increase the clotting power of these unfortunates' blood. However, since the disease is a "skipper"—carried only by women, immune as a sex to its ravages, and transmitted to their children, thus occurring only in every other male generation—Larry had decided to concentrate on the women who perpetuated the disease rather than the victims themselves.

Through study of some two score actual cases and perusal of the records of hundreds more, he had come up with certain conclusions he considered at least worthy of attention by a biological board, if not worthy of a Ph. D. But perhaps the pedagogues of science were not yet ready to approach the disease so obliquely. It certainly seemed so, in view of the curt letter of rejection that lay on the table to his left.

Or perhaps there was some conspiracy, deeply hidden but devilishly effective, working against any promulgation of this theory. It seemed truly strange to him that no one had pioneered such an apparently obvious field before him. Larry shook himself out of this train of thought, well aware it could lead only to paranoia.

Yet, annoyingly, it recurred. He went back mentally over the course of his friendship with Ned Tolman. Sure he had known Ned a long time—one summer at the shore when they were both kids in their early teens, for two years at college before Ned flunked out due to the pressure of ever-increasing extra-curricular activities.

But they had never been really close until both of them turned up here in Boston, a couple of years before, Larry to work in the laboratory of a huge drug and chemical plant, Ned to hold down

Male vs. Female

THE war of the sexes has been the subject of story, poem, song, article. textbook—and just plain worry for as long as there have been men and women. And a lot of objective philosophers, having reached the age where sex was no longer an annoyance in their lives, were able to derive a great deal of amusement from it. But take war and reduce it to a science—it might cease being funny, even a war of women upon men. Still our friend Merwin seems to have derived considerable diversion from this trip into the future wherein a race of aggressive females decide that men have got to go. And how close they came to making it—well, see for yourselves.

—The Editor

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the assistant city editorship of the *Gazette*. They had stumbled across each other at a bar, both of them lonely and thinly acquainted in the city, and had poured out their stories to one another.

Unexpectedly, for Ned was about as scientific-minded as an amiable tomcat, the newsman had shown immediate interest in Larry's then still-shadowy project for attacking hemophilia by the back door. He had said, "Listen, my microbe-hunting friend, you are on the straight path to recognition and riches—while I am on the path of a story that could get me out of this Fleet Street wallow into the air-conditioned grandeur of *Life, Time, Fortune* or even the *Saturday Evening Post*. I hereby appoint myself your Boswell."

"Okay, Boswell, you can buy the next drink," had been Larry's reply. It had all been fun and games—or had it? From then on Ned had hung close to his figurative coattails, egging him on, encouraging him, even occasionally digging up records of another case of the dread disease from files in the *Gazette* morgue.

WHY, Larry wondered, should his friend have egged him on to such stunning failure? It didn't make sense. Yet something had very definitely gone wrong. Perhaps, despite all precautions, a bit of the slangy newspaper approach, with its empirical emphasis on wished-for results rather than the factual, scientific approach, had crept into his thesis. Larry didn't see how but it could have happened. Certainly something had gone wrong.

He was still pondering such unanswerables when there was a knock on the door. Thinking it to be Mrs. Bemis, perhaps on a mission of unwanted solace, he said, "Sorry, I'm about to take a shower."

"Then turn your back so you won't see me," came the unexpected reply in cheerful and pleasant young feminine tones.

Larry got up in a hurry and opened the door for Ida Stevens. She entered in a clean aura of Schiaperelli's *Shocking*, clad otherwise in wide-wale blue corduroy that matched the delft of her eyes and a simple white shirtwaist whose demure looseness failed to conceal the fact that it was remarkably well filled. Ida was above medium height for a girl, her hair more than medium brown, her features more than medium-generous in cut.

She placed a slim, well-groomed hand against the side of Larry's face and kissed him on the lips. Then she said, "Larry, Ned just phoned and told me the bad news. He said you were about to call the corner drugstore and order a revolver."

Larry looked at her with gloomy affection. He said, "Do you have to be so goddam witty?"

"That's the old spirit, hemoglobin," she said gravely.

"Stop trying to cheer me up," he replied, grinning reluctantly. "Just now I don't *want* to feel good and you're making me."

"I've only just begun to fight," she replied gravely, helping herself to a cigarette from the pack that lay open on the table. "Put on your personality and come ona my house. I'ma gonna giva you steak Ida Stevens."

"What's that?" he asked suspiciously. Ida, who was passing pre-marital time at Miss Greeley's Academy of Domestic Science, in a more-or-less chaste old Federalist mansion on the west slope of Beacon Hill, had been known to come up with some eerie culinary efforts. He recalled with a shudder one casserole of perfectly good lamb chops hopelessly mired in an olio of bananas, molasses and sherry.

"Oh," she replied, "I just put a two-inch boned sirloin under the broiler, turn once and serve in its own juices. It's a little trick I picked up from that *cordon bleu*, Ned Tolman."

"You're lucky if you don't pick up leprosy from him," said Larry generously. While he still felt a certain reluctance to dismiss his fine fustian melancholy, he wasn't exactly sorry to let it dissolve in Ida's company. Besides, she

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was more or less his girl for reasons known only to Ida, and he *had* been neglecting her of late.

It was Ned again who had introduced him to Ida—he had known her in New York earlier. In a way the girl was a problem. She was far too nice a girl to be treated casually, yet Larry had considered himself in no way prepared to undertake a serious emotional commitment while sweating out his thesis. Now that he had failed he felt less ready than ever to do so.

Ida had money—how much Larry had never asked nor had she volunteered. But her trim two-and-a-half-room apartment on Commonwealth Avenue, her casually costly clothes, her "studying" at Miss Greeley's—all of these spelled large blocks of gilt-edged stocks, to say nothing of five-figure accounts in the bank.

Furthermore Ida had family with a capital F though her parents were as dead as his own. It was, perhaps, the fact they were both orphans that had drawn them to one another in the first place. But she spoke casually, if infrequently, of staying with her grandmother in New York or California or the West Indies. The only traveling Larry had done was as a G.I.

While they rode cab-fashion to Ida's apartment, he wondered if such social and financial factors had also prevented him from engaging in a deeper relationship with Ida. Annoyingly, he had a strong idea that they had—and cursed himself for an inverted snob.

NED TOLMAN separated himself reluctantly from the smooth Vermont granite facade of the apartment house where Ida lived. He was a tall, lean young man with a mobile, featureless face the color of a fine new pigskin wallet—caused by some gastric disorder that had caused his physician to put him on a diet of beef, lamb and blueberry muffins. By his own account he was allergic to vegetables.

His presence on a Boston newspaper was something of a minor mystery, for Ned had been on the verge of attaining success as a syndicated general columnist in Manhattan when, shortly before Larry turned up in Beantown, he had suddenly quit and joined the *Gazette*.

When asked, his usual reply was, "Heed well, my fine ring-tailed inquisitor—if I could, through patient and assiduous research, discover the reasons for a minescular percentage of the things I do, I'd annoint myself with peanut oil and join one of the large families of Smithfield hogs. I came here—so what?"

He did, however, explain his somewhat baroque verbosity when pressed, explaining it as the normal compensation of a frustrated Christopher Marlowe forced to earn his living by compiling the quasi-legalistic telephone-booth scrawls that passed for newspaper English.

He greeted Ida with an elbow hug and, glancing at Larry, said, "I see you brought the steak on the hoof."

"You bore me," said Larry with what aplomb he could muster.

They rode the elevator to Ida's place in an atmosphere of absurd bickering, carefully calculated by Ned to lift Larry's sagging morale. But, once Ida had planted them on either side of a bottle, with glasses and ice and went to the kitchenette to broil the steak, Ned regarded his friend somberly and said, "Sorry if I overdid it just now, baby. But this thing has given me almost as much of a jolt as it's given you. After all, I had a hand in starting you on it."

"I still think it's an important subject for research," said Larry. "Maybe we're just too big for science." He tried a smile.

The newsman shook his head. "Let's not kid ourselves," he said thoughtfully. "After you called I did a little checking. Once in a while our pals, the academic bureaucrats, do make mistakes—odds teeth, even bankers make 'em. I've got me a little friend who knows a sweet buck-toothed kid who sits on the typewriter of the dean's private office, waiting for it to hatch."

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He shook his head and went on with, "All I could find out was that there was no mistake—that word came down from somewhere on high to give your *chef d'oeuvre* the old crow-hop to the nearest exit. You haven't been romancing any dean's daughters or beating their fathers at golf or anything equally serious, have you?"

Larry shook his head—but his friend's remarks offered the first ray of light to reach him since the finding of the rejected thesis on his lodging house table. He said, "That's screwy—you mean there was actually someone working against me—or it."

"My grapevine made it sound something like that," said Ned.

"But why, for Chrissakes?" Larry asked. "It doesn't make—"

"Sure it makes sense—under some sets of conditions," Ned interrupted, eying his glass balefully. "Unfortunately our most highly regarded institutions are composed of men and women. And men and women do the damnedest things at times. If they didn't, there wouldn't be a single newspaper published in the United States."

"You realize what you're saying?" Larry asked.

"Sure I realize what I'm saying," was the reply. "Larry, my boy, there's one thing you don't seem to have pounded into that thick layer of corundum that passes for your skull—the only truly sacred cow is what Ida is broiling a hunk of in the kitchenette. Do I make myself clear?"

"No," replied Larry promptly. "But I'm not giving up."

Ida, who had appeared in the doorway behind a gay ruffled apron, said, "Larry, dear, I hope you're not going to keep on butting your head against a stone wall. You're so gifted. There are so many other branches of science you could tackle."

"Back to your steak, woman!" Ned ordered with gestures. "I want to pour this poor, shrinking hunk of alleged humanity another generous slug of your whisky before you feed him."

"All right," she said, turning, "but I still think it's wrong."

As he tipped the bottle, Ned remarked, "Women! Either they or we should be quietly strangled at birth. What a war!"

"*Hey!*" cried Larry. "That's enough—you'll spill it over."

"Never," replied the rewrite man. "Me waste good booze?"

II

WHEN Larry again became a more or less responsible organic whole, he found himself seated uncomfortably in a damasked armchair that reminded him of an old-fashioned Pullman chair in the unyielding hardness of its upholstery. Around him was the potted-palm and imitation pink marble of a hotel lobby reared at the beginning of the century and never modernized.

He looked at the thick Manila envelope on his thighs—it held the thesis that had been so thoroughly bounced just the day before—and thought he must have lost his mind. In spite of Ned Tolman's idea that influence had been used against his study of haemophilia, it seemed far more likely to him that he had simply written a lousy thesis.

Certainly he must have been out of his mind to come to New York, merely on the chance of getting it accepted at Columbia. He felt a strong pressing desire to crawl aboard the first train that would get him back to Boston.

While it was unlikely that he would lose his job at the laboratory for being AWOL after two years of faithful service—still, it wasn't going to do him any good. Larry decided he'd better send his boss an explanatory wire.

He got up and crossed to the desk and sent off his telegram. The gilt-handed clock above the honeycomb of pigeonholes that contained keys or letters or both of Queen's Crown guests informed him it was not yet nine A.M.—and that there was little point in his delivering his ill-starred thesis before ten.

The smell of hot coffee, toast, bacon

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and other breakfast comestibles tickled his jaded nostrils pleasantly and, with his envelope under one arm, Larry crossed the lobby and entered the hotel dining room. He was, he discovered, starving. The cuisine of the Queen's Crown was for some undisclosed reason excessively English, and for that Larry was grateful in his present appetite.

He ordered fruit, kippers, hot muffins and coffee, was in the process of giving the order to an elderly servitor who looked as smoothly worn and patinaed as the lobby woodwork, when he noticed a gray little man just seating himself at a table against the opposite wall.

The gray little man wore one shoulder slightly higher than the other, which gave him a shrinking appearance—and there was a distinct leftward deviation of his septum. Larry would not have given the man more than casual notice—but he had a distinct recollection of having seen him sink into a seat across the aisle of the milk-train day-coach that had brought him from Boston.

For a moment he wondered if he were being followed—then dismissed it as another bit of paranoiac thinking on his part. After all, he decided, it was scarcely stretching coincidence that another Bostonian should have boarded the same late train to New York and, like himself, headed for the Queen's Crown.

But the incident served to make Larry consider, while waiting for his food, the events of the evening that had caused him to pick up the rejected thesis and climb aboard the train, determined to give his opus a chance with the authorities at Columbia. Or vice versa, he thought wrily.

He tried to restore some sense of order to the chaos of the night. In his emotional upset, the second drink at Ida's seemed to have been the keystone, or perhaps the cornerstone, to what followed.

He could, or thought he could, remember everything that had happened—but somewhat obscurely, as through a cloud of dry ice vapor. Ida, for once, had foregone her cooking school trickery and the steak had been first-rate. So was the whisky that went with it. The evening had degenerated into argument—with Ned insisting that Larry continue to force the issue where his thesis was concerned and Ida equally convinced he should abandon the whole project and go after his degree from a totally new angle.

She had said, "Ned, if you keep insisting that someone is exerting influence against Larry's thesis, you'll be giving him delusions of persecution. Besides, even if it's true—which I don't for a moment believe—there's no sense in bucking it."

And Ned, for once forsaking his usual florid verbosity, had replied, "But, Ida, sweet—if there *is* some abuse of influence in the University, we want to find out who's exerting it and why."

"So you can get another story for your lousy paper?" Ida, usually serene, had spoken with unusual heat.

And Ned had smiled crookedly and said, "Of course I want a story—hell, that's my business, getting stories. But more than that I'd like to expose what strikes me as a rotten setup."

"And what if the setup isn't rotten? What if you cause trouble for a lot of innocent people?" Ida countered.

"We've still got a potential injustice against Larry here to investigate—and you know it," Ned insisted. "I had an idea you were fond of this acid-stained character."

There had been tears in Ida's light blue eyes and Larry, stirring himself from demi-somnolence over a highball, had sat up and said, "Why don't you both shut up? So they don't like my thesis at the University here—so what? I'll run down to New York and submit it to Columbia. Whittaker's supposed to run a good department there. And I don't think he's an easy guy to be got at—if anyone *is* working against this tripe of mine."

This had set off another wave of arguments—with Ned supporting his action and Ida dead against it, on the grounds that it was simply tossing good money,

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time and energy after bad. Finally her evident lack of confidence in his work nettled him to a point where he rose on his hind legs and barked an announcement that he was going to take his thesis and hie him to Manhattan right then and there.

IT HADN'T proved as simple as that. There were no planes running at that time of night and the last train had already taken its long load of sleepers out of South Station. After picking up the thesis Larry had been forced to wait a dreary ninety minutes before a milk train pulled out for New York.

He had dozed most of the way down, had not really come to until he was sitting in the lobby of the Queen's Crown, just a few blocks removed from the biology building where he hoped to deliver his opus. All in all, there had been mornings that found him feeling better than he felt just now.

He was also beginning to suffer from an acute case of cold feet. The brashness of his conduct appalled him. Yet there was some quality in his nature that was going to force him to go through with it; he was aware of this, in spite of his self-consciousness.

It had carried him through a rugged freshman year at college, although the high school in the small Midwestern town from which he came had left him woefully short of training. It had got him and the surviving crewmen of the PT-boat he commanded in the Pacific through an interminable forty-day stranding on a Jap-held island. It was going to make him submit his once-bounced thesis at Columbia.

Without any especial awareness, as he munched his kipper, Larry found himself studying the gray little man at the wall table. The man had an odd, birdlike way of pecking at his food.

At that moment the man looked up and his colorless eyes met Larry's half-amused regard. For an instant they widened in panic—and then returned Larry's speculative gaze with a steady glare that could only have been deliberate, a glare that held hostility unmatched in the young biologist's experience.

It was Larry who dropped his gaze first. After all, he told himself, engaging in a contest to outstare a stranger was the height or depth of something or other. He shoveled more herring onto his fork but its flavor was metallic and suddenly unpleasant.

For a second or two he could not recall the familiarity of that acrid taste. Then he thought of the half-eaten meal he had tried to eat out of cans on his PT-boat before going into action for the first time. The same flavor had interfered with his eating then.

The metallic taste was the taste of fear.

The malevolence of the glare the little gray man cast in his direction could mean only one thing—that he had followed him from Boston. Carried further, it hinted at the reality of Ned Tolman's conviction that some quasi-sinister forces were at work against his thesis. There actually was some sort of conspiracy working to prevent his thesis from being read or approved. He was not just rationalizing his failure.

Or was he? Larry pondered this while he waited for his check. Wasn't it possible that this latest theorizing was merely an extension of paranoiac logic? The little gray man's hostility might stem from the fact that he suspected Larry of following *him*.

Thus reassured, Larry paid for his breakfast, tipped the waiter and walked out of the dining room. By the lobby clock it was nine forty-two. He went on out to the sidewalk, blinking in the brightness of the morning sun, then walked slowly east toward Morningside Heights and the University.

AT THE corner of Broadway he paused on impulse and looked behind him. A half-block down the hill the little gray man had stopped to look into the window of a shop Larry distinctly remembered as unoccupied. He felt the muscles of his forehead knot in a frown.

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Dammit, he mused silently, what in hell is this all about?

He gave it up; his determination increased to let nothing bar his thesis from a second submission and consideration. As he crossed Broadway's double lane his footfalls seemed to inquire, *what—have—you—discovered—about—haemophilia—that—anyone—could—fear*. His footsteps failed to answer him, merely repeated the senseless question.

As he turned toward his destination Larry risked a sidelong glance at his pursuer, was in time to see the little gray man skip quickly to avoid being run down by a speeding bus, bowling its way downtown. Unconsciously he hastened his steps. He didn't know what the little gray shadow wanted, but had no desire to let him catch up with him.

When the forefinger tapped his shoulder Larry started abruptly and all but dropped his thesis. A flat demi-tough voice said, "Got a match?"

Larry said, "Glub—glurg—sorry, I'm in a hurry."

"Oh no you're not, Mr. Finlay," said the other.

The use of his name by this stranger brought him up short. His interceptor, a stocky, rough-hewn character with a scarred stucco-colored face and hair the hue of an Irish setter's coat, was standing squarely athwart his path. A cigarette dangled from his lower lip in precarious balance and his hands were in his jacket pockets. Larry wondered if one of them concealed a weapon.

He tried another tack, said, "I don't know how you know my name, but I haven't time to stop now. I've got a paper to deliver in there—" with a nod toward the graceless cluster of university buildings to his right—"and there's someone following me."

"That's very interesting," the stranger told him. "Where is he?"

Larry turned and saw the little man approaching slowly, no more than ten yards behind him. He said, "Him—in the gray suit." The object of his regard, seeing himself discussed, came on at a more rapid pace as if to hurry past Larry and the stranger.

The pale stranger spoke out of the corner of his mouth. He said, "Watch this, Finlay," and there was an undercurrent of mirth in his voice and manner.

He stepped into the path of the little gray man, holding up a stubby muscular hand so that Larry's pursuer rammed into it with his chest. Then he said, "I been layin' for you, macushla. I warned you not to come hangin' around my sister any more."

The little man's eyes darted from his tormentor's to Larry's, frightened and furious. He bleated, "But I assure you there—"

"No mistake, macushla," said the pale-faced stranger ominously. "If anyone's makin' a mistake it's you, chubby. Now, *git!*" He gave a sudden shove that sent the astonished man staggering back. Rimless spectacles flew from his nose and the stranger, with one swift stride, brought a heavy shoe down on them, pulverizing them.

The little gray man let out a yelp at the sound of their crushing. He blinked foolishly. Then, with a whimper of despair, he turned and stumbled away, bumping into occasional irate pedestrians in his erratic progress.

"That the eggplant you mean, Mr. Finlay?" asked the mystery man. And, as Larry nodded in bewilderment, "Good, let's take a stroll toward the biology building. That's where you wanted to go, wasn't it?" His spurious Irish brogue had been dropped completely.

"Listen," said Larry, "I'm perfectly capable of delivering my thesis myself. But I would like to know how you know so much?"

"I don't know much," was the reply. "My boss simply tells me this morning to come up here and wait for you to come along, then to make sure nothing happens to you. He shows me a picture of you."

"What's going to happen to *me?*" Larry wanted to know.

"Nothing, now," said the unknown.

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with frightening confidence, "but you never can tell what might have happened." They were opposite the entrance of the biology building and Larry started to cross the street. But his companion pulled him back.

"Let's wait it out a little," he said. "It's safer."

"I'm beginning to think one of us is nuts," said Larry. He felt vaguely like Alice after her passage through the looking glass. It didn't seem to him that much more could happen to him after the events of the past sixteen hours. He wished he could put his finger on some key or incident that would give him a clue to what was going on.

They waited five minutes, then lit fresh cigarettes and waited five more. The situation was, Larry told himself, ridiculous. Why he let himself be detained he couldn't understand. But the pale-faced stranger had known his name, had gotten rid of his pursuer, and spoke with the authority of a top sergeant.

STUDENTS and instructors passed, moving to and from classes and study rooms in all directions. Their pattern was leisurely, aimless, varied. And then, from the building across the campus street a tall young man came trotting. He wasn't actually running, but there was about him an air of desperate haste, even when he paused for a moment at the top of the building steps and looked about him.

He was a handsome youth, Larry thought, for all his expression of strain and confusion. Suddenly he seemed to listen, then took the steps two at a time and moved rapidly out of sight toward Broadway, vanishing among the knots of students and sightseers.

"Let's go," said Larry, deciding it was time to take action.

"Just one moment more," said the stranger, resting a steel-fingered hand on his forearm. "Things are beginning to happen."

Even as he spoke two men, one of them wearing a gray campus policeman's uniform, came bursting through the double doors of the building from which the young man had emerged moments before. A hum of excited comment, interspersed with shouts, rose around them. The red-haired man listened, then hailed a student who had come running from the building. "What happened?" he asked.

"Some screwball just shot one of the stenographers in the biology dean's office," he said. "Lemme go—I got a class."

The stranger released him, then turned to Larry and said, "I don't think they'll be taking in many theses today."

"I guess not," said Larry. "Damnation!" Something, it seemed to him, was always cropping up to prevent his thesis being read. He walked slowly down Broadway with the stranger.

At the sidewalk he turned, intending to return to his hotel and call the biology department for an appointment. But his interceptor said, "Hey, I'm supposed to take you with me. My boss wants to talk to you now that we've seen what they've done."

"I'm sorry," Larry told him, "but if your boss wants me, he can reach me at the Queen's Crown. I'm going there now."

"That," said the stranger, "ain't the way I heard it."

Larry was vaguely aware of the long black shape of a big car pulling up to the sidewalk behind him. But he had no time to note its make or license number before one of the pale-faced man's fists seemed almost gently to caress the point of his jaw and run along it toward his ear.

Once the contact had been made between fist and jaw he was in no condition to take note of anything. . . .

III

HE WAS lying in bed. Without opening his eyes Larry could tell, from the feel of the sheets against his skin, that he had simply torn off his clothes and turned in raw. Mrs. Bemis must have come up with a set of uncommonly

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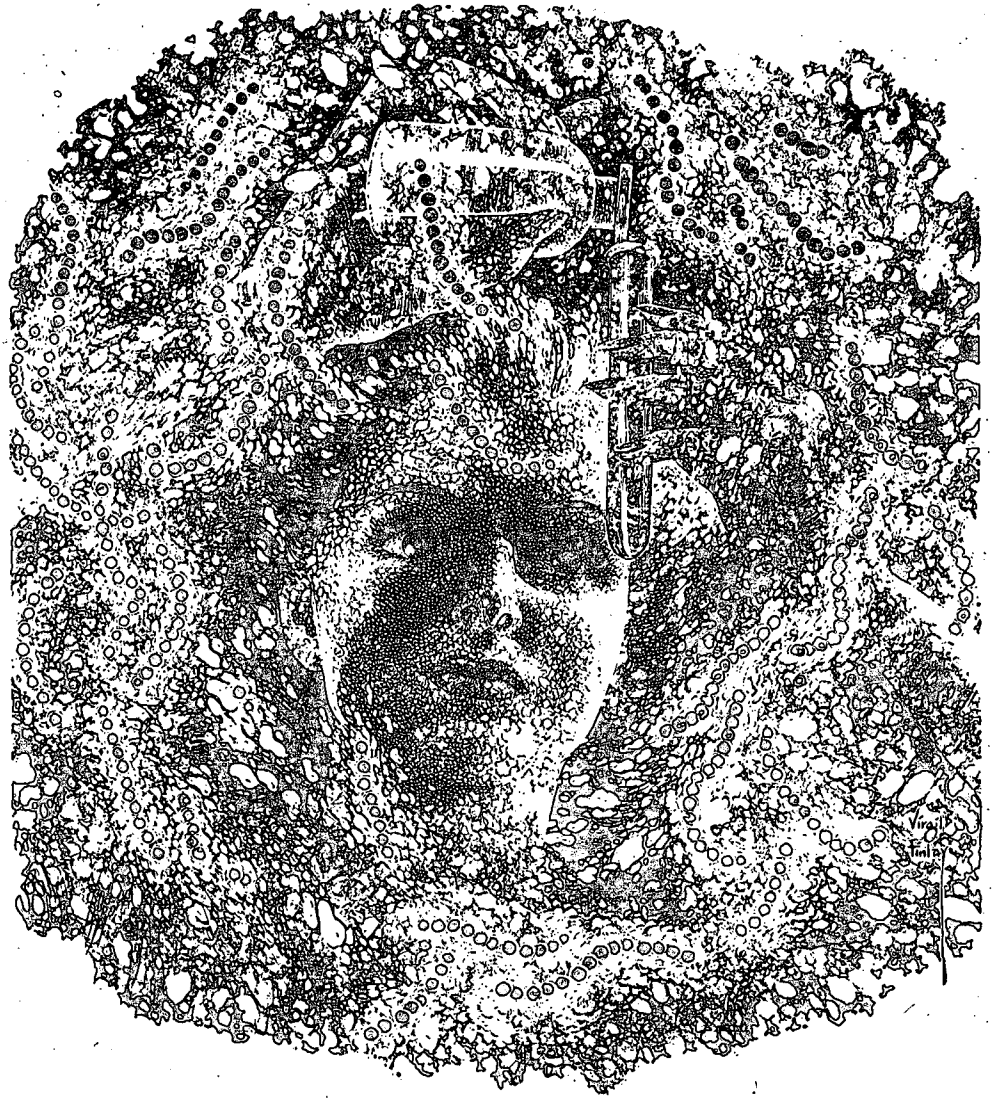

Women prepared the hideous cultures of bacteriological warfare

soft sheets, Larry thought delightedly.

Luxuriating in unaccustomed comfort, he stirred slowly, keeping his lids down. His body might appreciate such luxury, but his head didn't. He had been a fool to take so much whisky at Ida's—and from the ache in his jaw he decided he must have fallen down somewhere and banged himself properly.

And there had been the dream—so realistic in every detail. Incident after incident came flooding back—the argument at Ida's, the decision to go to New York, the long dreary train ride, breakfast in the Queen's Crown, the little gray man, the rough stranger with the russet hair, the shooting in the biology building, the. . . .

Strange, he decided, how melodramatic the mind could get under the stimulus of alcohol and emotional pressure. He was going to open his eyes and find him-

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self looking at the familiar set of spidery cracks upon the ceiling of his room in Mrs. Bemis's lodging house.

He decided he might as well get it over with—there were going to be apologies to make to Ida and Ned and a logical course of action regarding his own future to consider. Slowly he let his lids drift upward—and found himself gazing at a chaste white ceiling whose center was ornamented by an ornate floral oval in high relief.

He sat up, supporting himself stiffly on the heels of both hands, and looked around in bewilderment.

He was in a vast Napoleonic roll-bed of dark mahogany, decorated with the gilt bees of the First Empire. It looked, to his astonished eyes, large enough to sleep an entire platoon of the Imperial Guard, or a couple of squads of concubines. No wonder the sheets had felt soft against his skin—they were of pale purple satin!

On the walls, which were also of satin, in alternate vertical stripes of pale gold and imperial purple, were a set of charmingly lascivious mezzotints, portraying latter-day nymphs and shepherds rollicking amorously in the unmorality of the Age of Reason. Through the single-bowed window Larry could see only the foliage of a tree, masking fragmentarily what looked like the gray stone façade of a Norman chateau.

He stepped out of bed onto a soft carpet of rose-gray that extended from dado to dado, looked at himself anxiously in a magnificent seven-foot Venetian mirror that adorned much of the opposite wall. He opened a door, found himself peering into a closet that would have served as a full room in a modern apartment. It was empty.

Moving to the right, he tried another door, which he judged to be a way out. The gilt knob turned easily in his hand, but the door itself refused to open. It was locked from the outside. With panic beginning to stir inside him, Larry turned left and tried the one other door beyond the huge closet. It opened and he found himself staring into a thoroughly twentieth century bathroom.

He mopped a suddenly beaded forehead with the inside of an elbow.

For a moment he had had an uncanny feeling that he might actually have been transported back through time to the Napoleonic era. He went to the bowed window, peered around heavy drapes, saw that the tree was one of a row rising from the sidewalk of a Manhattan cross-street, that the Norman façade across the way was strictly local architecture. Tentatively he tried to open the window. It refused to budge.

He was still standing there, seeking in vain to puzzle things out, when a soft grating sound behind him caused him to spin around. The door opened and a tall, long-limbed, dark girl, almost Spanish in her brunette vividness, entered. Over one of her arms was a dressing gown, in one hand a newspaper, in the other a lighted cigarette.

Too startled to dive for the modesty of the satin sheets, Larry stood, naked and dumb, while she tossed him the robe. He was very much aware of her amused scrutiny as he struggled into it and managed to belt it around his middle. It was a magnificent robe of purple and gold and big enough, he decided, to hold four of him.

He said, "Where in hell are my clothes?"

THE girl regarded him with a slight smile. She said, with a faint shrug, "Don't ask me, Mr. Finlay. I guess you'll have to get along with the robe for a while— Unless you'd prefer to parade the beautiful pagan body."

"Oh, shut up!" he told her rudely. Sore jaw, befuddlement and all, he was hardly in a mood for badinage. He added, "Who are you?"

"I'm Dolores," she replied with faint mockery. "But you may call me Miss Green if you'd father."

"Cut it out—please!" he begged, suppressing an impulse—was it to strangle her? Then, "I've got to get out of here. Where am I?"

"At least you didn't ask that old chest-

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nut first," said Dolores Green gravely. She sat down on the edge of the bed, pulled a silver cigarette case from a pocket of her flared dark-tweed skirt, offered him one. When it was lighted she told him, "You're occupying the third-floor front of seven and a half East Seventy-fifth Street, Manhattan. You were brought in here yesterday morning at ten thirty-three and have been asleep ever since. Will that do?"

He regarded her levelly for a moment, then said, "You know it won't do. Why have I been asleep so long? Was I doped?"

"You might call it that," she told him with unconcern. She was, he realized, a remarkably handsome young woman. Her skin glowed almost nacreously with health, her eyes were alert with intelligence.

But he thought of Ida and his purpose in coming to Manhattan and steeled himself against such wayward normality. He said in what he hoped was a quiet, controlled voice, "I suppose you know you're a party to a kidnapping, Miss Green—that when I get out of here, if I do get out of here, I shall bring charges against you and everyone connected with this establishment that will mean jail for all of you. Help me, and I might exclude you from my accusation. Under the circumstances are you going to be nice or not?"

Her slim fingers moved to the throat of her blouse. With utter guilelessness she said, "It depends on what you had in mind."

He rumpled his short hair despairingly, said, "There was a while, just now, when I thought *I* was crazy." He left it at that.

The odd and disturbing thought, he found, was the increasingly apparent beauty of Dolores Green.

He forced himself to meet her dark eyes full-on and said, "I suppose yours is the way to a long and happy life, but just now I want your help in getting the hell out of here. Time for play later—maybe."

A dark eyebrow flickered upward a fraction of an inch; already full lips acquired the added fullness of a pout. The girl said, "How disappointing. Perhaps you'll feel more agreeable after you've had breakfast. But Mr. Cornaman wants you to look at this before you make up your mind to do anything rash." She handed him the paper.

Like every other young man of normal ambition, Larry had dreamed at times of seeing his name in headlines. But under the circumstances the experience was shocking rather than pleasant. He read:

Columbia Girl-Killer Identified as Boston Biologist

Police Seek Lawrence Finlay—Apparently Maddened by Rejection of Ph. D. Thesis

Horrified, Larry forced himself to go on reading. A Miss Arlene Crady, it appeared, one of the battery of secretary-stenographers employed by the Columbia University Department of Biology, had been shot to death while sitting at her desk, minding her business, the morning before. The killer, described as witnessed in flight by a number of bystanders, was tall, medium-blond, definitely handsome.

Larry recalled the young man whom he and his kidnapper had seen emerge from the Biology building just before the hue and cry arose. Surely that had been the murderer. He wondered how the devil they had happened to pick on himself as the killer. He read on and found out.

On the slain girl's desk had been found a thesis entitled *A New Approach to the Problem of Haemophilia* by one Lawrence Finlay. From the address on the cover they had quickly tracked Larry to Boston, had learned of the summary rejection of the thesis by the authorities there. A few excerpts followed.

The stirrings of fear he had felt when the little gray man gave him the malevolent look in the hotel dining room, and when he had so lately awakened to believe himself cast back a century and a

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half in time, were as nothing to the panic and horror which gripped him as he stared at the newsprint before him.

Blood does not truly flow, as physicians would have us believe; except when forced by pressure through an open cut or wound it remains static, much like the deep ocean water. Corpuscles flow and float through it like sticks of wood tossed on the water's surface, impelled by current rather than flow. This is a fact scientists have failed to grasp, and its importance is immeasurable.

He thought he must be going crazy. Certainly whoever had written such tripe must be crazy—if the author believed in his words. Another excerpt caught his eye.

The blood of women who produce haemophiliacs is not blood at all as we know it—it is more like the ichor of the ancient gods and, in conjunction with normal blood, creates a weaker fluid. . . .

He threw the paper aside in disgust. Never in his wildest moments had he entertained such insane theories. He looked across the room at Dolores Green. She had seated herself on an Empire chair and was smoking a fresh cigarette.

She said, "Kind of woolly reading, isn't it, Mr. Finlay?"

He asked with icy anger, "Where is my real thesis? What's happened to it?"

A gleam of curiosity entered her dark eyes which she quickly veiled. "Why," she said, "isn't this what you wrote?"

"You know damned well it isn't," he retorted, his anger growing.

She merely shrugged, as if the matter were unimportant, and told him, "How should I know? I only work here. By the way—" she paused to look at a bracelet-watch on one slim wrist—"I'm supposed to deliver you downstairs for breakfast in exactly two minutes."

"Why? Will it take that long to poison the eggs?"

She rose with languid grace, made a moué, said, "*Really*—and here we are, trying to protect you from the police and everything! I think you're behaving very badly, Mr. Finley.

"Probably," he replied, his anger unabated, "but what I'd like to know is who rigged things in the first place so the police are after me." He paused, rearranged his outsize robe, added grimly, "If there's anyone who can answer my questions here, lead me to him."

"Come along then," she said. At the door she flashed a look at him over her shoulder and despite the darkness of the corridor outside he got a definite impression she was laughing at him.

AS THEY proceeded to an ornate gilded elevator cage Larry caught a glimpse or two of other rooms, all of them magnificently and expensively furnished and decorated. If he really were a prisoner, he decided, he had certainly landed in a plush jail. Riding down in the elevator he became suddenly conscious of the dark girl's femininity, of the deep slow rise of her bosom, of the smooth curve of her cheek, of the rich musky perfume envelope within which she stood.

He felt utterly silly in the huge robe—and vulnerable.

Two stories down the elevator stopped. With a sinuous motion the dark girl opened the grille, led him across a wide, dark hall to a lofty oval chamber where an oval, white-clothed table was set beneath an immense crystal chandelier. However, the only light came from silver-mounted electric candles in twin-fixtures along the blue and silver brocade wall.

The tablecloth was topped by an immense double-decked lazy Susan, upon which silver chafing dishes and bowls and egg-shaped platter covers picked up gleaming highlights. To the left as he was ushered in, Larry saw a man sitting in solitary state.

"This is Mr. Finlay," said the dark girl. She paused beside Larry in the doorway, vanished at the man's nod of dismissal.

"Come in and sit down—I have a place set for you," said the solitary breakfaster, pointing a silver butter-

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knife at a table service arranged to his left. "Pardon my not rising—but in my case the ritual is a bit of a problem."

His voice was a ringing basso profundo, his accent and articulation impeccable, his reason for not rising self-evident. Larry's host was clearly the man for whom the outsize dressing gown he wore had been cut and tailored. He must, Larry decided, weigh something upwards of three hundred pounds.

Hesitantly Larry seated himself, staring in awe at the vast mountain of food with which the fat man's plate was heaped. His host beamed at him and said, "I regret that we have been forced to use methods which may have struck you as rude to bring you safely here, Mr. Finlay—but when I explain I feel certain you'll understand why they were necessary. You see, we had very little time to plan, much less in which to operate.

"See anything you like? There are kidneys stewed in Madeira—just beyond are huevas rancheras—if you'll spin the table under that large cover, you'll find breast of pheasant and Canadian bacon. The hashed brown potatoes are to your left." He accompanied this sightseeing tour with further directional jabs of his knife.

Larry studied his smiling host for a long moment. He felt as if he were being engulfed in a sea of fantasy. What had happened to him in slightly less than forty hours was a succession of events that simply couldn't have happened. He ran a tongue over suddenly dry lips and flatly asked, "Who the hell are you anyway?"

The fat man, who had been wiping his mouth, dropped his napkin to the overhung ledge of his lap. He said, eyebrows high on his forehead, "Oh, dear! Didn't Dolores tell you? I'm Mayne Cornaman."

The syllables started a succession of memory gongs ringing in Larry's somewhat fevered head. He muttered, "Miss Green did say something about a Mr. Cornaman wanting to see me, but I'm afraid I didn't nail it down." Then, blurting, "But I had an idea you were. . . ."

The fat man laughed, a deep, rumbling chuckle. He said, when his mirth had subsided, "A lot of people think I'm dead—I want them to think so. They wouldn't like what they saw if they saw me, so I try not to disappoint them."

Larry helped himself absent-mindedly from one of the covered casseroles in front of him. Mayne Cornaman! This was too much. Yet, studying the mounds of flesh, peering around and beneath them, Larry was able to discern the aquiline nose, the pointed jaw, the distinctive hairline of the man who had, for a time between World Wars, been acclaimed the most brilliant scientific mind in America. In those days, however, Cornaman had sported a Professor Challenger beard.

He was looking at the bloated wreckage of a man who had unerringly, from the breadth of his learning and at times through the illogical accuracy of his intuitive genius, put the atom-smashers on the trail. Before him sat the man who had formulated a whole new theory of the quantum relationship between nuclear particles that had yet to be disproved—the man who had been refused a Nobel Prize at twenty-eight solely because of his youth.

"There's too much of me to be a ghost," Cornaman told him drily, "so don't look at me as if I were a spook."

Larry swallowed a mouthful without registering its taste, then gathered himself and said, "Mr. Cornaman, I don't know why you had me brought here. I don't even know if I'm sane. Apparently my poor thesis on haemophilia has caused a ruckus for some reason of which I am unaware. Would you mind telling me what the whole thing's about?"

"Don't worry, young man," replied the erstwhile genius. "You are perfectly sane. As to your being the victim of a conspiracy because of your thesis, let's say rather that your thesis has

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threatened to expose a conspiracy—a conspiracy that has lasted some three thousand years."

"Now I know I'm crazy," muttered Larry, reaching for a glass of water. "By the way, what's happened to my thesis?"

"At the moment it's safe in my study," replied the fat man. "I have just finished reading it. I consider it to be the most important piece of theoretical scientific work since my own Ph.D. thesis. I congratulate you. But it can wait until we are through eating."

With this he helped himself to four ranch-style eggs, a hillock of potatoes and a half-dozen more kidneys.

IV

WATCHING Mayne Cornaman eat was an awesome process. Deliberately he finished his second plate, then swung the lazy Susan around and helped himself to a third heaping portion, this time of sliced pheasant and Canadian bacon. He culled four tablespoons full of buttered mushrooms from over a chafing dish flame, added three pieces of toast from a napkin-covered silver dish, pausing only to sip from an immense goblet at his right elbow.

He said, "If you'd care for champagne. . . ."

Larry, strickly a bacon and eggs man, gulped and shook his head. He wondered why any man, especially one with the angel-high reputation of his host, should deliberately gluttonize himself to this incredible degree. Had he not gone twenty-four hours without food the younger man would scarcely have been able to eat a thing. As it was, he managed to partake only sparingly of the incredible array of food. The coffee he poured himself was excellent.

When at last he had finished, the fat man used a fingerbowl with bathetic daintiness, mopped his lips with his napkin and pushed back his chair from the still-groaning board. He said, "Now, if you will follow me, young man, I believe we have things to discuss."

"I believe so," said Larry, reduced to a near-shambling numbness by the fantastic succession of events.

He followed his host from the dining room, across the hall into a study shaped like half an egg and lined with books from floor to ceiling. Cornaman, who by some miracle of self-control had not waddled when he walked, lowered himself into an outsize chair behind an exquisite Empire desk, motioned Larry into a chair opposite. He folded thick fingers and studied the younger man with an odd air of Buddhistic detachment, his head cocked slightly on one side.

"Just a moment," he said, holding up a hand as Larry opened his mouth to speak. "First. . . ." His voice trailed off. He picked a paper cutter from the gold-tooled leather top of the desk, plunged its tip into a squat bowl of flowers at his elbow. After fishing out a small, odd-looking device, he used the dull edge of the paper cutter to loosen a screw. Then he returned the gadget to the flowers, cutter to the desk.

"Dolores," he said by way of explanation. "She likes to spy on my private conversations. This time I'd prefer she didn't. That item I just unraveled is a bug—a microphone."

Larry frowned his bewilderment. "But, if she's some sort of spy," he offered, "why don't you get rid of her?"

"Too good looking," came the prompt reply followed by a thunderous chuckle. "Besides, if I got rid of her they'd simply put somebody else in her place—and that somebody might not be as attractive. Logical, isn't it?"

Larry was tempted to say, "Sure, for a lunatic." But he managed to keep his mouth shut.

Mayne Cornaman chuckled again, said, "I have a fair idea of what you're thinking, young man. No, I'm not crazy. But we're wasting time. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"There is," Larry replied promptly, having had time to marshal what passed for his thoughts at the moment. "First, I'd like my clothes back. Second, I'd

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like to know what in hell this is all about. Third, I'd like my thesis if I may."

"We'll take care of the thesis first, if you don't mind," said Cornaman. He swung his swivel chair about until he was facing the wall with his back to Larry. For a long moment he sat perfectly still as far as Larry could tell. Then, without warning, a wall panel slid aside, revealing the door of a steel safe behind it. After another few seconds of immobility the door opened and, grunting, Mayne Cornaman half rose and extended himself to pull out the missing thesis.

"Do you mind telling me how you did that, Mr. Cornaman?" Larry asked, his more momentous worries forgotten for the moment.

"Not at all," replied the scientist, placing the thesis on the desk. "I'm quite proud of that little gadget. It opens to an encephalitic key. Under certain self-induced mental stimuli my brainwaves react in a certain pattern. The locks are set to respond to my reaction to two of these stimuli when I am within a distance of five feet of them."

"Good God!" exclaimed the younger man. He recalled a toy of his youth—a dog kennel from which the black-and-white tin dog would emerge when anyone called, "Fido!" close to the kennel door. Or was the name "Towser"? He wasn't sure, but it was the same principle, immensely developed and amplified.

"A gadget—a gizmo," said the obese scientist casually. "I have been able to support myself and this establishment quite comfortably by taking out patents on a number of similar bits of trickery."

Casual or not, trickery or not, Larry felt himself overwhelmed at this practical application of first-class inventive scientific genius. He felt a twinge of jealousy at Mayne Cornaman's talent, at the freedom it had given him from the worldly cares that have stifled so many lesser talents. Then he considered the incredible grossness of the scientist and was jealous no longer. The fat man was imprisoned in the padded barriers of his own flesh.

Yet there had been little of the gourmand in the manner of his host's approach to his appalling breakfast. Rather, it had seemed to Larry at the time, as if Cornaman were forcing himself to eat against his will and appetite. Surely such a man was not one to let himself deteriorate physically merely to indulge an excessive appetite.

THE scientist, who had been watching him intently, seemed to divine the tenor of Larry's thoughts. He said with a faintly rueful expression, "Perhaps you realize the fact that my weight is neither of glands or gourmandism. I eat as I do, I look as I do, because I consider it important to stay alive."

"I don't quite understand," said Larry, feeling ridiculous in his tentlike dressing gown. "Has it anything to do with me?"

"I'm afraid so," was the reply. "But first I'll have to tell you why I live as I do, why I overeat as I do. You may or may not remember—but twenty years ago I was right on top of the heap."

"I remember," said Larry. "You were a sort of idol of mine."

"Me and Babe Ruth, probably," was the fat man's reply. He smiled faintly, went on with, "I was right in the forefront of the investigation and discoveries that ultimately led us to the atomic bomb—not that any of us believed our discoveries would be put to such a use."

He paused, added, "And then I stumbled on something that seemed to me a lot more important to the human race and its survival than anything we could hope to accomplish through nuclear research. You see, I have the misfortune in this age of specialization of being a person incapable of specialization. Like the late Stephen Leacock's knight, I like to mount my horse and charge off in all directions. Some of them have led me into curious corners indeed."

"Please go on, sir," said Larry when his host paused again.

"Hooked are you? Good!" said Cornaman with his faint smile. "Well,

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I'll try to be brief. I got interested in the problem of parthenogenesis. I know laboratories are producing young rabbits and guinea pigs without the aid of male sperm these days, but I was way ahead of the game. In nineteen thirty-six I actually produced two litters of kittens, three of puppies and one Shetland pony colt without any fathers being on the premises."

"I'll be damned!" said Larry, almost reverently.

Cocking his head the fat man said, "You've heard nothing yet. I was keeping my experiments more or less secret—the country was still close to the Stokes trial at that time and anything smelling of virgin births was bound to kick up a hell of a fuss if the newspapers ever got hold of it.

"But there were leaks, of course—and from then on I found myself in trouble." Cornaman lit a cigarette from a silver box on his desk with a silver lighter, pushed it toward Larry, who accepted a smoke gratefully. His host resumed with, "I began to get pushed around. One by one my other lines of research were blocked. I felt as if I were being forced into parthenogenetics and nothing else.

"Well, I didn't like it. I had my process all but ready to try on human guinea pigs, but I was damned if I wanted to be pushed. Besides, I was curious about who was doing the pushing. So I did a little digging of my own. I knew there had to be a hell of a lot of influence to work successfully against *me*. I had a lot of my own in those days."

"I should think so," murmured Larry, his own problems forgotten.

"Well, I ran one trail to earth. Believe it or not it was an organization of women. At the time I thought it was a lobby left over from suffragette days that was looking for a new reason for being. I found out ultimately it was a lot more than that—and a lot more elusive. While I was investigating I stopped all my experiments.

"The opposition didn't like it. They sent some thugs to beat me up, but I managed to run away from them—in those days I still could run. The next day a young lady called on me—no mistake, she was a lady-plus—and suggested I get along with my work unless I wanted a repetition of such unpleasantness in my very near future.

"There was also a suggestion that if I went to the police I'd find myself locked up in a loony bin before I knew it." His laugh was short and sharp as thunder immediately overhead. "I knew they'd have little trouble making that stick. Plenty of people already thought I was crazy.

"I did some checking and found myself fairly stymied. Lord—you have no idea how influential women can get, especially in a time of peace and depression. It scared hell out of me. So I did what you'd have done—I stalled along with my experiment while I was actually finding out something about my enemies.

"Luckily, by some freak of chance, I recognized the young lady who had called on me in spite of the alias she used—I'd seen her picture in a society rotogravure section just the Sunday before, showing a prize-winning dog at Westminster Kennels. I looked her up, also the women I learned were her closest friends."

HE PAUSED impressively, then added, "I discovered that all of them came from lines of strong feminine descent on at least one side. In checking newsclips I found that my caller's father, who had been what editors used to like to call a "well known clubman and man about town," was also a bleeder, a haemophiliac. I found haemophilia or at least some equivalent weakness in the masculine lines of all of them."

"For Pete's sake!" Larry exclaimed softly. He was all attention now. "You're bearing out the corollary of my thesis!"

"Or your thesis is bearing out the reverse side of my theory," countered the fat man. "Take your pick. While I didn't tie haemophilia in as conclu-

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sively as you did I was on the right track—and I scarcely needed additional proof from my angle."

"But what does it mean?" asked Larry, shaking his head. "Why should any group of men or women be so anxious for parthenogenesis or so set against my thesis being read?"

"Because they daren't risk exposure at this late date," the fat man informed him. "These are not ordinary women. They have as much contempt for their unrelated sisters as they have for men. They want parthenogenesis in order to be free of men."

Larry frowned, said slowly, "But in time, surely, that means elimination of masculine characteristics entirely from the species."

"Probably a plus point from these women's angle," replied the scientist. "Surely you can apply some of the characteristics you have noted as prevalent in the type."

Larry rested a forearm on the front of the desk and thought. There had been a number of definite characteristics, some physical, some physiological. For one thing, haemophilia carriers tended to be women of a driving, dominant type, which he had termed the *Empress Type* in his thesis—their drive intensified by their ability, with or without great native beauty, to make themselves attractive to men.

They were strongly erotic, with a tendency toward lesbianism, basically heterosexual. Physically, in most cases, they tended toward unusual length of limb, coupled to longevity and extranormal strength and speed of reflex. During the last century, a number of mediums and other sorts of spiritualists had been haemophilia carriers. All of them seemed to be strong on so-called intuition and psychic hunches.

Larry mentioned these points to Cornaman, who nodded. "You were shrewd on the psychic business," he said. "I have a great deal of material on that topic. Lesbianism too—basically these women are believers in a world of one sex. Amazons, if you will."

"But why so violent about exposure?" Larry asked.

"Because, young man, they stand a better chance now of achieving success than at any time since their remote ancestresses lost dominance over humanity when the worship of the Moon Goddess succumbed to the masculine sun worship."

Larry looked at his host with disbelief, but Cornaman merely smiled and shook his head and said, "No, I'm not crazy. I have seen a few of their records, carefully kept hidden from generation to generation since the Dionysian Rites were subverted to a festival dominated by men instead of women, since the Delphic Oracle was looted and destroyed. Ancient legend and modern history and science are being fitted together like the two halves of a broken coin."

"To what purpose?" asked Larry.

"I should think the purpose is obvious," was the retort. "For the first time in history man actually has managed to manufacture weapons sufficiently deadly for total destruction.

"I do not think it is to the interest of our friends to have the world destroyed," the scientist went on. "Certainly, however, it *is* to their interest to have it roughed up a little—say, four-fifths of the population destroyed and civilization reduced even more drastically—as long as they are equipped to ride out the storm."

Larry frowned, still larded with disbelief. He said, "Well, how do they propose to sit out an atomic attack, sir?"

"They could probably do that—some of them," replied the fat man. "However, it is my belief they do not intend to permit the development of atomic warfare on any large scale. You may have noticed the apparent unreasoning screams from the Kremlin of late about germ warfare. I believe our friends behind the Curtain have a clue of their own. Well, couple this with the superb resistence to disease of these women of what I call the Amazon strain and make four."

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The younger man considered it. Taken as a hypothesis there was nothing especially illogical about the theory. Certainly the women whose records he had studied showed a remarkable resistance to plagues and all other forms of disease, just as their sons were peculiarly susceptible to everything from whooping cough to leprosy.

However, fitted into the larger picture Mayne Cornaman proposed, it failed to make the larger picture any the more credible. He said so, added, "I might be able to accept part of it—but that business about the Moon Goddess. I'm afraid I simply can't credit it, sir."

The fat man sighed but regarded him tolerantly. He said, "Very well, we'll let the background rest for the time being. But are you still convinced there is no conspiracy of widespread efficiency? How do you suppose they were able to find out about your thesis? How were they able to prevent it from being read in Boston? How were they able to set up the neat frame for you at Columbia yesterday morning? It would have worked to perfection if I hadn't sent Dan Bright to intercept you and hold you until that other poor devil walked in."

"It seems to me," said Larry thoughtfully, "that a man like yourself is in a much better position to arrange all these things you mention than some mysterious organization of women. How do I know you aren't behind all of it, for some purpose you have not yet revealed?"

As the words crossed his lips Larry cursed himself for a fool. He might very conceivably have signed his own death warrant by speaking them. But Cornaman merely threw back his four chins and emitted a bellow of sheer delight. When at length it subsided, he looked at Larry with tears in his eyes and said, "There's just one good reason for not accepting your theory, Larry—I didn't do any of it."

"But you did kidnap me and bring me here and keep me unconscious," Larry said quietly. "How did you know about me and why did you do these things?"

"You're a tough one, no mistake," the fat man said benignly. "I heard about you from a source I don't intend to reveal. Suffice it to say for now that there are people who do believe in the danger and who work night and day to subvert and check it. We have a spy or two in the enemy's camp, just as they have spies in ours. In neither case are these agents necessarily of a single sex. Think, Larry—how did you happen to select the subject for research in the first place?"

V

LARRY thought. Keeping in mind what Mayne Cornaman had told him about the supposed conspirators using men as well as women, he recalled how Ned Tolman had picked him up in Boston, how Ned had helped to channel his quarter-baked ideas on haemophilia along the lines that had led to his thesis. He recalled the apparent mystery of the newsman's giving up a promising career in New York merely to sit in a Boston city room.

He considered Ida, the one other person who had been close to him during the past two years. Certainly she was scarcely suspect. It was Ida who had sought all along to have him tackle some other subject, who had tried to get him to give up on his thesis after the summary rejection two days before. She hardly fitted in.

Then he found a flaw in his reasoning. He said, "If what you suggest is true, why should one of these women's agents have tried to egg me on into writing the thesis, if it is as potentially damaging to their cause as you claim?"

The fat man regarded Larry with a flicker of appreciation in his deep-set eyes. Then he replied, "There could be a number of reasons. Perhaps they hoped to learn something about themselves from your research—or perhaps it never occurred to them you might stumble on the facts that you did. I don't pretend to know all the ways in

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which they are working. Or perhaps they were trying to block you all along. At the moment I'm not sure. All I know is that we were tipped off about your rebuff, got word of your plan to come down here, also that some sort of summary action was planned."

For the first time, realization of the fate he had thus far narrowly escaped sank into Larry's consciousness. He could almost feel the blood drain from his face. He said, a trifle unevenly, "You mean they actually planned to have me framed for murder—that they'd kill one of their own agents to bring this about?"

"Yes—and no," was Cornaman's rumbling reply. "They planned to frame you neatly enough—but you would never have burned. The faked thesis was designed to have you locked up in a loony bin. As to killing one of their own agents, I doubt it. The girl had probably no idea of their existence."

"Then how did they set it up?" Larry inquired anxiously.

Cornaman gestured away the objection. He said, "In any number of ways. As you yourself noted, these women are above normal on psi qualities. Some of them are highly gifted hypnotically."

"But how could they get anyone to murder against his will?"

Cornaman leaned forward, resting his hands palm down on the leather desktop, said, "It's a safe bet neither you nor the other young man fired the shot. We know you didn't and it is most unlikely the other young man could be induced to murder. I'd guess both he and his supposed victim were hypnotized while a third party fired the shot. I'd also guess that the young man hasn't the slightest idea of what actually happened." Larry recalled the bewildered expression on the tall young man's face when he emerged from the building the morning before. He nodded and said, "It's seems awfully involved somehow."

"Given special talents," the fat man said, "what looks involved to us may seem remarkably simple. But back to my own story for a bit. The ladies kept hemming me in. They made themselves known in lots of most unmerry little ways. Once, when I was being driven to make a talk to a group of scientists, my lady chauffeur conveniently got us 'lost' in an isolated mountain area. I was informed I'd be left to starve unless I consented to further parthenogenetic experiments—with human beings, of course. After two days I gave in."

"Good Lord, sir!" said Larry. He had decided, for the time being, to take the entire fantastic saga as gospel. Later, when he had time to think things over, he could make up his own mind.

"Gives you a turn, doesn't it?" said Cornaman, grinning. "You can imagine what it gave me, especially when they produced a poor young creature, obviously under some sort of influence, as a guinea pig. A perfectly healthy specimen, but with the mind of a zombie."

HE RUBBED a plump hand across his mouth and chin, went on with, "You know something about current experiments with laboratory beasts—a quick-freeze of the Fallopian tubes at the moment of ovulation? I had conducted my previous tests along the same lines—with certain refinements. But I was by no means anxious to do anything so illegal to a member of my own race."

"What *did* you do?" asked Larry, appalled by the problem.

Mayne Cornaman grinned saturninely, told him, "Oh, I put her through a lot of paces—but the method I used to make her pregnant was a lot less parthenogenetic than my bosses suspected. Once the young lady was definitely pregnant I never saw her or her offspring."

"I'll be damned!" said Larry, appalled as much by the fat man's ruthlessness as by the efforts of the female conspirators. "You don't even know the child was born?"

"Oh, I'm pretty sure of that, young man," was the reply. "My bosses were quite enthusiastic—for a while after that. Then they became more pressing than ever. They wanted to know the details of the process."

At the self-satisfied expression which

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flitted across the vast moon countenance of the scientist, Larry was forced to smile. Truly, there were Jovian qualities to the jest, despite its inhuman grimness. He said, "How did you handle them then?"

"I ate," said Cornaman quietly as his voice permitted. "I ate and kept on eating. I've been eating ever since."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," said Larry hesitantly.

"Consider my position," Cornaman offered. "They thought I had the secret—and for all they know I may have, and may have it still. I didn't have it ready for them nor did I intend to give it to them. But, convinced I had it, they were willing to go to any lengths to get it from me.

"I knew I didn't have the peculiar type of fortitude that would enable me to stand up under torture—any man who does is only a fool in my opinion. As it happens, a childhood bout with scarlet fever has left me with a slight heart murmur. It's nothing dangerous—at least not for a good many years to come—but it makes a hell of a scary show on a cardiograph.

"There was only one thing to do—get myself and keep myself in such condition they wouldn't dare subject me to physical torture. I can take any mental or psychological pressure they put on me." A gesture of contempt accompanied this statement. "So I decided to make myself so fat and keep myself so fat that they wouldn't dare subject me to bodily stress. I could think of only one way to do this without exposing myself to more discomfort than I wished—eating."

Recalling the deliberation and determination with which Cornaman had attacked his monstrous breakfast, Larry nodded. Granted the truth of the circumstances, it was an escape of truly masterful cunning—worthy even of a mind like Mayne Cornaman's.

The scientist chuckled, added, "Result—once I had attained sufficient poundage—stalemate. They have kept me surrounded by agents, like Dolores, and I have gone ahead with my investigation of their activities. Oddly enough, I've come to enjoy being fat."

He paused and, when Larry said nothing, added, "There is something about being immensely fat that gives a man power over women. I doubt that they make such a fetish about masculine thinness because of the insurance tables. Longer life in their thin mates may be a factor, and women do like Apollo—but Hephaestus, Vulcan if you will, fascinates them the more. There is a basic truth concealed in the Beauty and the Beast legend.

"A fat man to them is a challenge—as much so as a handsome male who ignores their wiles. The desire they feel should be directed toward themselves has been diverted to other channels. They deplore it, they resent it—but above all they yearn to capture it. Somewhat to my amazement I have learned that a fat man need not be unhappy."

Fascinated, Larry nodded again. Truly here was a creature culled direct from the pages of Rabelais. He said, "What have you been able to learn about this so-called conspiracy of Amazons?"

"A great deal in some ways—not enough in others," was the answer. "I know much of their history and methods—virtually nothing of their organization and leadership."

"Granting their existence," said Larry, "How have they managed to pass down the special knowledge they require? And considering that sometimes they bear only daughters or that granddaughters and grandmothers must at times be separated by death or distance, how have they kept going?

CORNAMAN nodded, accepting the validity of both questions. He said, "Their knowledge is passed down like all other knowledge—by teaching. Here and there, where the strain is prevalent, you will find one of them teaching dancing or theater or a foreign language. Usually such teachers have pet pupils and special small classes of such pets. In these the knowledge and history is taught.

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"As to recognition, all trained members of the conspiracy have signs they are able to recognize—signs the outsider would seldom notice or understand if he did. Remember, they are strong on the psi qualities. The movement of some small object without apparent volition, the picking of successive winners at a race track, a telepathic greeting—these or other signs of recognition amount to the fraternity grip."

Larry digested this. Then he said, "But if these women have such super powers and are so well organized, how is it they haven't achieved their aim of running things here before now?"

Cornaman closed his eyes and for a moment Larry thought that the fat man had fallen asleep. Then he opened them and said, "Consider the problems they have faced since the growth of primitive male-dominated civilization put the Mother Goddess out of business in favor of Zeus, Odin and the like.

"Masculine dominance must be subverted either through male weakness or technical compensations before women can dominate. Women never had a chance in the basically homosexual male culture of Greece. In Rome, further from Asiatic influences, they nearly succeeded when the aristocracy became effete. The barbarian hordes came just in time.

Essentially, "it seems the people of Earth are still too masculine and barbarous for domination through male weakness," Cornaman went on. "These daughters of the Amazons have striven desperately to develop a civilization in which they could rule. Something has always gone wrong. At times, as in the case of ancient China, they have had to abet the destruction of what they had fostered but could not dominate. They tried by marriage to rule the Concert of Europe in the last century—you have recorded the spread of haemophilia through Queen Victoria's granddaughters—but

Perhaps

Perhaps a vacuum is a lie
Containing molecules
That never answer to the eye,
Ignoring all the rules. . . .

Suppose a substance does exist
That acts upon no sense
By which a testing analyst
Could test its difference. . . .

If there are such, then there may be
A world behind the shrouds,
And none would be surprised to see
Strange castles in our clouds!

Perhaps, one day, we all will hear
A new and different tune
Where atoms built a different ear
And bridges to the moon. . . .

by A. Kulik

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failed and abetted the destruction of that order in World War One.

"Now thanks to the snowballing of science," said the fat man slowly, "they have changed their methods. They plan to let civilization destroy itself, emasculate itself—and at the same time attain an undreamed of ambition, utter freedom from man in progeniture. They put Eva Peron in Argentina, Ana Pauker in Romania, along with a host of less conspicuous agents, to further their aims. Peron is dead but she has worked gains for them whose extent we cannot now surmise. And Pauker has been removed only, I believe, because the Soviets are becoming aware of the threat to their masculine type of rule."

"There's a lot of guesswork in this," Larry offered doubtfully.

Cornaman shrugged again. "Of course there is," he said. "Thanks to the obvious restrictions under which I must operate I am forced to proceed largely by empirical judgment. However, when my theories fail to work out, I am not so unscientific as to be unwilling to scrap them. I'm trying to fit together a jigsaw puzzle of which I have only a few pieces—and those pieces constantly altering shape and color."

"It's a problem, all right," said Larry. Then, "But I still don't see why my thesis is so important."

"In the larger picture," the fat man told him, "it isn't. But it does represent a threat, if only an indirect one. Consider—from now on, in their effort to speed victory, these Amazons must work more and more in the open, take increasing chances of discovery.

"Should your thesis be the commencement of a direction of research leading to the discovery of definite lines of heredity among some females that give them super powers while weakening the men-children they bear, it might, almost certainly would, lead to discovery of how important has been their influence on history. And once the conspiracy was in the open, it would be easily checked."

"So they set out to stop me," said Larry. Then, realizing the fat man had not answered one of his questions clearly, "Tell me, sir, just how did you get on to what I was doing?"

Cornaman fixed him with an enigmatic stare. He said, "Young man, the less you know of our organization just now, the less you know of theirs, the safer you are. I doubt they would give you time to eat yourself into invulnerability as I have. Besides, you don't have the secret of parthenogenesis to bargain with."

Larry nodded. Then he said, "But with other scientists getting closer and closer to parthenogenesis all the time, aren't you afraid you won't be in a bargaining position much longer?"

Again the fat man closed his eyes. "I'm terrified," he said simply. "Which is why I am working night and day to expose the conspiracy before that happens. That is why I was forced to use such crude tactics on you yesterday, young man. You have made some valuable discoveries in your research—and more important you have shown the ability and original cast of thought needed to make more."

"I understand," said Larry. "But what I don't understand is why you kept me under dope for a day after kidnapping me."

"For that I am sorry," was the reply. "However, in my opinion it was quite necessary. I still think it was necessary.

"How so?" Larry demanded.

"Consider," said Cornaman. "If you had not been unconscious you would have been wild at being kidnapped. You'd have made all sorts of difficulty—quite justifiably, I fear. I should not have had time to study your thesis. More important, I should have lacked time to see just what line of attack your enemies and mine had adopted. Now we can begin to make plans."

"Possibly," replied Larry without much enthusiasm. "But if Dolores is one of their spies, they must know where I am."

"Of course they do," said the fat man promptly, "but in tipping off the authorities to where you are they would be running a tremendous risk of exposing

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themselves. And furthermore, they aren't going to know where you will be within a few hours."

"Where is that?" Larry wanted to know.

The fat man leaned forward again. "I'll tell you in a moment," he said. "In the meantime, I want you to do some more work on your thesis . . ."

VI

THREE days later Larry listened to the playback of a tape recorder, then clicked off the machine as his own voice stopped. He looked up at the man with the Irish setter hair and the terra cotta face and said, "Well, Dan, I think that does it. After Mr. Cornaman okays it you can have it typed and we're on the road."

"Sounds okay to me" said the fat man's factotum. "So far the boss thinks you're riding the beam on the nose."

He crunched out a cigarette in an ashtray atop the bookcase at his elbow, then bent to unreel the tape from the recorder. He put it into a flat cylindrical container, thrust it into his pocket, turned to leave.

"Hey!" said Larry. "Aren't you going to take the machine?"

"Not yet," replied Dan Bright from the doorway. "I'm leaving it here in case of revisions or something. No sense lugging it all around town. Better put those notes away though. Dolores has been looking like she's sucking a caramel lately."

"All right," said Larry. He didn't get up as Dan Bright left. He was much too tired. He was more tired than he had ever been in his life, even during the stretch on the enemy-held Pacific island during the war. In seventy-two hours he had allowed himself no more than a half-dozen hours of sleep.

But the job was finished—he hoped—and he was too keyed up to relax completely. He allowed himself to dwell briefly on what had happened since his after-breakfast conference with Mayne Cornaman. He was still reserving judgment as to whether the fat man was mad or not. But mostly, he had worked.

Using the recorder instead of a typewriter, he had enlarged the original fifty-thousand words of his thesis to seventy-five—incorporating into it dozens of incidents from the fat man's own files implementing the findings of his own research. It was, he felt sure, a far stronger thesis, one which must point unerringly, if only via suggestion, at the existence of the conspiracy.

It established the fact that women who carried in their veins and arteries the seeds of haemophilia and other inherited male weaknesses were definitely a breed stronger and more vital than the rest of the race. It also established the fact of a compensating lack of strength in their male offspring. Oddly enough, neither he nor Cornaman had been able to find a trace of paranormality in the daughters they bore.

Presented under the aegis of Mayne Cornaman, with his vast if somewhat tarnished prestige, it would do more than win Larry his coveted Ph.D.—it would make him something of a brand new wonder in biological circles. Given to the proper authorities, it would make the name Lawrence Finlay one to reckon with.

At the moment that name could use some refurbishing. While it was no longer a top-headline anagram, the cognomen of Arlene Crady's supposed killer was still appearing with prominence in every edition of every New York paper as the search went on.

Larry was no longer using it. Among other things accomplished by Mayne Cornaman and Dan Bright, while he lay under opiates in the Seventy-fifth Street mansion, had been the establishment of a brand-new identity for the fugitive biologist. He lit a cigarette and sat back in his chair, considering his new self.

HE WAS now Raymond Deming, a young man of independent means, who had sublet an East-side apartment for an indeterminate stay in New York. His medium-length hair had been cropped in Ivy League fashion by Dan

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Bright, shortly after the interview.

His clothes—the faithful and somewhat shiny companions that had accompanied him on the milk train from Boston—had never been returned. Evidently someone had taken his measurements while he was unconscious and done yeoman work with a top-flight tailor.

Larry's hair cut, Dan had laid out for him clothing whose cut and material were far superior to any he had ever owned or ever wished to own. Like the majority of young men with a serious mission and slender means, Larry had never even considered "serious" dressing.

The soft linen shirt, the quiet tie, the English bench-made shoes, the butter-soft cashmere socks, the full-lined perfectly-cut gray worsted suit, the cufflinks and tie-clips of gold and enamel in the shape of tiny antique pistols, the incredibly light vicuna topcoat—they had given him the feeling of lying between satin sheets while walking around fully clad.

There had been a trunkful of other clothes awaiting him at the apartment where he had become Raymond Deming. He wriggled in the shantung silk of a new sports shirt, enjoyed the coolness of fine flannel slacks, as he lay back, smoking and trying to relax.

Verily, he thought, working stiffs like himself knew little of the creature comforts that could accompany wealth. The gold-cornered alligator skin billfold atop the bureau in his bedroom contained some three-hundred dollars in cash. Beneath it, in one of the two top drawers, was a bankbook with a comfortable five-figure balance.

He had tried to protest being thus made a creature of charity but Dan, methodically and efficiently shepherding him into his new existence, growled, "Listen, Mr. Deming—whatever you get from the boss you'll earn. In a way you've earned this already. Didn't he have me kidnap you?"

"Thus saving me from a bum murder rap," Larry had replied. But he had decided to go along with it, there had been nothing else he could do.

The apartment itself was a marvel of luxury—a two-and-a-half room palace in miniature, in one of the costly new apartment buildings overlooking the East River. He got out of his armchair and busied himself with stowing the notes Mayne Cornaman had given him in a steel cabinet behind a picture on one of the bedroom walls. There was no sense, he thought, in leaving them lying around. Not that he'd been bothered—but still. . . .

He was suddenly intensely lonely. He looked with longing at the phone on his bedside table. All he had to do was pick it up, dial Long Distance and be talking to Ida or Ned in a matter of minutes. He wondered what they must think of him, Ida especially, with the police after him and not having got in touch with them. He frowned as he considered Ned and his possible role in what had happened.

But, suspicious or not, he'd have given a great deal to exchange just a couple of silly jokes with either of them. And he couldn't call them. No phone calls, except to the restaurant downstairs for meals, were permitted. It was one of the conditions under which he was living. He could hardly let Mayne Cornaman down after what the fat man had done for him.

Dan had been right, he decided. He was certainly earning the favors shown him—with interest. A fugitive, unable to come forward and clear himself, living a false life, cut off from his few friends. And on top of these, putting in almost seventy-two hours of continuous work, getting the enlarged thesis in shape.

WITH the notes stowed away and safely behind a combination lock, he considered pouring himself a drink—a cellarette well stocked with Scotch, Bourbon, cognac and lesser liquors was part of his new environment. But he had never relished drinking alone, and the mere impulse served only to increase his loneliness.

He wandered out on the balcony which provided an external passage from bed

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to living room. His neighbor lay stretched out on a gaily striped beach chair, what looked like a mint julep at her elbow. She looked up and saw him and gave him a sleepy, crinkly grin and said, "Ho there Deming—how is the house hermit this evening?"

"The house hermit," he said, "is thirsty—also in a mood to come crawling out of his cave. Care to have a drink over here?"

She shook her head, causing long-bobbed, dark-blonde hair to frame her face like the skirt of a whirling ballerina. It was quite a face—one of those sharp-planed faces fashion photographers love, in this instance given humanity by a warmth of unexpectedly dark eyes and a fine, full mouth. She said, "Why not come on over here."

"I'll consider it," he smiled, letting his gaze catalogue to the full her perfection of figure, at the moment more revealed than obscured by the knee-length culottes and striped halter she was wearing.

Her name was Toni Loring and they had met two days earlier on the first morning of his residence in his new home. He had stepped out on the balcony after a night of recorder-wrestling for a breath of fresh air; she had been sun-bathing quite openly, had let out a squawk at sight of him and dived for the shelter of a tentlike beach poncho of biscuit white, adorned with hand painted seahorses.

Regarding him reproachfully she had said, "Why don't you ring gongs or rattle or something before you move into vacant apartments?"

He had smiled, apologized, introduced himself. It had seemed to him a good chance to try out his new name. She had said, "I'm Toni Loring, Mr. Deming. I live here. I'm a model. Anything else?"

"That," he had replied with what he hoped was a creditable imitation of the light touch, "would seem to be up to you?"

He had seen her a couple of other times in the two days between then and now—once when he had pushed a room-service wagon back into the hall after a meal and she had emerged with a can full of garbage for the incinerator, once more on the balcony just the night before, when again he had emerged to eliminate mental cobwebs via a fresh air treatment. Until now he had considered balconies a superfluous architectural feature for any but a dictator. Now with sudden appreciation of Romeo's plight, he was wondering how anyone got along without one.

He said as much when the girl admitted him to her apartment. "Think, if Romeo had a balcony too, Shakespeare would have had to rewrite his whole second act!"

"He could have put them both in a helicopter," said the girl. She apologized for the appearance of her home, which looked perfectly neat to Larry, then produced another julep as if by magic. She turned on a large record player, which promptly began to play Cole Porter tunes softly, then led him back to the balcony and a beach chair adjoining her own.

LARRY, like most mere mortals, had never before known a New York model. When he had thought of the species, which was seldom, he felt a tendency to consider them as something rather above and beyond the rest of humanity. In short, a little frightening to such as himself.

But Toni Loring, he thought, was the most restful girl he had ever known. Sitting with her on the terrace, talking when either of them felt like talking, but more often keeping silent, he felt the tensions under which he had been laboring during the five days past fade with the sunset.

He thought, I'd better watch myself or I'll give myself away. He thought also that Toni might be a spy. Then he dismissed the idea as absurd. At the moment the strange fears and fetishes of Mayne Cornaman seemed as untied to reality as the dreams of childhood. Besides, it was unlikely that the presumed conspirators would be able to plant her so securely in the next apartment to

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Raymond Deming.

He reminded himself guiltily not to forget Ida—but it was hard to think of anyone else in the serene warmth of Toni Loring's company. She said, over the top of a second julep, "I'm dying of curiosity about you, Ray. I've told the girls at the agency about the dreamboat who moved in next door and they're hungry for facts. You might not think it, but this town is very short on eligible hes."

"There's not much to tell," he replied, hoping she wouldn't press the matter.

She didn't, much to his relief—though somehow he had known she wouldn't. Somehow, later, he found himself asking her to have dinner with him. She rose, smiling, and said, "Sounds wonderful—I'm horribly sick of the menu downstairs. I guess you can get sick of anything if you have it too regularly."

Larry, who had intended to ask her to dine either in his apartment or hers, thought what the hell. He wasn't actually a prisoner and it was unlikely that he'd run into anyone he knew. Outside of Dolores, Dan Bright, Toni, Mayne Cornaman and the little gray man, no one in the city knew him, except possibly some old Navy buddies. He considered it unlikely that any of them would recognize him in the luxurious wrappings of Raymond Deming.

He thought next of the crisp green bills lurking in the alligator fold atop his bureau; it seemed a shame not to put them to some sort of use. Besides, his fatigue demanded action and he had been more or less in confinement for four days. So he finished his drink, got up and said, "I'll ring your bell in fifteen minutes."

She wrinkled her nose at him and said, "Twenty."

Having read somewhere that Manhattan models required considerable time to shellac themselves properly for an outing, he gave her twenty-five—at the end of which time his own doorbell rang and he opened it to find Toni waiting there and saying, "Slowpoke!" in smiling reproach. She looked breath-taking in a clinging brown dress with gold belt and clips, topped by a gold-embroidered bolero jacket.

He himself enjoyed the new assurance of being well-dressed, in a suit of dark banker's gray that made him feel to the manor born. He said, "Any place special you want to go?"

She hugged his arm as they walked toward the elevator and told him frankly, "If you think I'm putting you on display this early in the game you're out of your mind, Ray. Let's go somewhere quiet."

Larry, who knew even less about New York restaurants than he did about New York women, was on somewhat of a spot. Then he recalled a place Ned Tolman had talked about, Hilary Duggan's, a restaurant much frequented by newsmen and writers and such when they had the price of a four-dollar steak or an eighty-cent highball. He suggested it and she said, "Good! It's just in the next block. Let's walk."

They walked through the twilight and for the first time in his life Larry felt the magic of Manhattan. The city seemed aglow with friendliness, to an accompaniment of soft, pleasant sounds. Even the honking horn of an outraged cabby caught behind a stalled truck seemed as unjangling as the comical outrage of Donald Duck.

THEY entered Hilary Duggan's, which lurked behind an unimpressive bar-and-grille front, complete with smoky glass window and dog-eared beer and cigar displays, on Second Avenue. The air within was thick with cigarette smoke and conversation. Toni steered him past the bar with its complement of booths opposite, to a rear dining room full of checkered table-cloths, people and the smell of good food.

A prematurely gray-haired man called, "Hello, Toni darling," to his companion and Larry felt a sudden, fierce jealousy.

Noting his expression as they sat down the girl patted his forearm affectionately and said, "You're really a lamb. You mustn't mind if people know me. After all, my professional life is rather—well, public."

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"Have your fun, beautiful," he replied —airily, he hoped. Actually, he told himself, he was glad she was what she appeared to be. Suspicion, planted within him by Cornaman and Dan Bright, still gnawed at him constantly. He glanced around at the other diners, noted with relief that they were predominantly male in gender.

He and Toni had another mint julep —almost as good as those the girl had mixed on her own terrace—and followed with the steaks and french fries that were the house stand-by. Toni amused him with occasional references to some of the neighboring diners, retailing an anecdote or two about some of them. She had, he discovered, a droll wit, which added to his sense of general well-being and merited fatigue. He was sorry when it was time to go, somewhat surprised to discover, nearing at the dim wall clock, that it was past eleven.

When the check was paid, Toni preceded him back into the bar. But at the entrance he stopped short, seized her shoulders, halting her progress. She looked around at him, wonderingly.

For the moment she was forgotten. At the far corner of the bar, almost facing him, Ned Tolman and Ida Stevens were seated side by side on stools, drinks in front of them. Ned was talking animatedly to an Ida who looked drawn and somehow drab by comparison with his present companion.

"What's the matter, Ray?" Toni asked in surprise.

He snapped out of his sudden shock, managed a grimace, told her, "I couldn't bear the thought of letting you run the gauntlet out there. My ego can't take it. Let's leave by the side door."

VII

OUT on the sidewalk, with the light streaming through Duggan's window providing an oasis in the darkness about them, Toni again hugged Larry's arm, looked up at him with a merry, thrusting glance and said, "Where now, brown cow?"

He smiled, feeling suddenly bone-tired, replied, "Toni, I don't want to sound unchivalrous—I never felt less unchivalrous in my life—but I've got to get home before I keel over. I'm pooped."

She hugged his arm again, told him, "Poor boy! I've been wondering just how much of an iron man you were. Your lights have been going full blast for three nights."

"Thanks for taking it so nicely." He paused by a newsstand on the corner across the Avenue from the restaurant. "Want a paper?"

"Not I," she said. "I can't afford much reading—I might get the habit and stop keeping this face and chassis of mine in shape for the photographers. After all, they are my stock in trade."

"Strictly boomtime stuff," said Larry idly. Then he stiffened as he caught sight of a black headline looming large across the top of a stack of tabloids. It said, CRADY KILLER CAUGHT—CONFESSES. He stared at it until Toni's tugging at his elbow restored him to reality. She was looking up at him, anxiety in her dark eyes.

"Is something wrong?" she asked a trifle breathlessly.

He shook his head, continued to scan the story in the dim light. The self-confessed killer's name was Jonathan Morgan, a post-graduate student in biology, who had dropped in that morning to consult with one of the assistant professors for consultation on a course for the coming year.

Then, according to Morgan, an honor student, "I don't know what happened. I came through the door and the next thing I knew I was looking down at Miss Crady, dead at her desk. I never saw her before in my life. I guess I got scared then and ran away. But I couldn't let this Finlay fellow take the rap for it. I never owned a gun and I don't know what happened to the one that killed Miss Crady. . . ."

There was more—a lot more—but Larry didn't read any more. If Mayne Cornaman was correct in his theory—and certainly the story seemed to bear

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him out—Jonathan Morgan was as innocent of the murder as was Larry himself. And if Morgan was decent enough to come forward and confess it would only be decent for Larry to reverse the process. But would it do any good. After all, Larry hadn't killed the girl and by coming forward at this late date he would probably confuse the issue further. But he had to do something. . . .

"Hey? Remember me?" It was Toni and she was tugging gently at his coat-sleeve.

Larry looked down at her and said quite honestly, "How could I ever forget you?"

Toni smiled up at him softly and said, "That's my boy—for a moment there I thought I'd lost you. It's enough to discourage a gal."

"Sorry," said Larry, tucking the paper under one arm, the girl under the other. "I guess I'm a little tired. Do you mind if we go on home—I haven't had much sleep lately."

"Neither have I," replied Toni. "Your activities have been cutting into my slumber. Maybe we'd both better take it easy."

BY THE time they got back to Larry's apartment he had decided first to call Mayne Cornaman, then to call the police whatever the fat man advised. But in the corridor he paused, unwilling to give up the comely comfort of Toni Loring. He didn't want to be alone just then with the confusion of his thoughts. Not after seeing Ned Tolman and Ida so unexpectedly, not after the stunning newspaper story. He said, "How about coming into my place for a nightcap?"

She said, her dark eyes briefly narrowed in speculation, "Turn about is fair play and all that?" Then, grinning, "What the devil! I've been dying to look at your apartment ever since you moved in, Ray."

He said, "You may have to mix the drinks—you do it better than I do and I'm bushed," and unlocked the door and opened it.

Toni said from beside him, "You don't need a nightcap. What you need is a housekeeper."

Larry didn't answer. He was too stunned. His apartment looked as if a rogue elephant had moved in and gone berserk there since he and Toni had taken off for dinner. Pictures had been removed from the walls, furniture upholstery stripped off, books scattered about viciously after being lifted from the shelves, rugs lifted and tossed around in careless heaps. Even the heaviest pieces of furniture had been casually upended and displaced.

"It's not funny," he told Toni tonelessly. "Somebody's been giving the place a complete ransacking." He turned, glowered down at her loveliness with unconcealed suspicion.

She gave a little gasp, said, "Oh, no, Ray! I'm not the sort of girl who lures a man out to dinner so his apartment can be searched. My interest in you is a lot more direct."

His accusatory bitterness relaxed slowly under the ingenuousness of her gaze. He shook his head, said, "Sorry, Toni—but this is a little unexpected."

"I understand," she told him, her eyes asparkle with excitement. "Did they get the jewels—or the documents?"

"Stop clowning," he said. "This is a mess. There aren't any jewels and the only documents they might have got went out of here this afternoon. But wait a minute. . . ." He made a move toward the bedroom, thinking of the safe in quasi-concealment behind a picture on the bedroom wall, of the telephone on the table. If they had got hold of his original thesis and Mayne Cornaman's notes. . . .

"Maybe you'd better call the police," Toni suggested, seeming to find him an increasingly romantic figure.

He told her, "Don't worry, I'm going to call them."

"It won't be necessary," said a short, stocky, weather-beaten man of middle age who emerged from the bedroom door. "I'm Lieutenant Harvey, Homicide." He unfolded unmistakable credentials under

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Larry's astonished gaze, asked, "Who's your friend, Deming?"

"Toni Loring—lives next door," came Larry's automatic reply. Then, "*Homicide!* Why—has somebody been killed here?"

"Not here," said Lieutenant Harvey in flat urban accents. "But I wanted to have a little talk with you—Deming."

Toni was tactful. Despite the curiosity that gleamed in her dark eyes she said, "We'd better have our nightcap in my place—whenever you and the lieutenant get through talking."

"Thanks, miss—it won't take long," said the detective. He waited while Larry escorted her to the door, leaning against a wall. Then he said, "All right, Finlay, what happened?"

Larry sat down on the side of an overturned armchair and lit a cigarette. He felt as if a couple of thousand pounds had been lifted off him. The ticklish decision of what to do about going to the police no longer hung over him. He said, "I suppose you had some reason for tearing this place apart."

Harvey drew a flat yellow tin from his pocket, extracted from it a thin miniature cigar, lit it, said around it, "You must think I'm a superman or something. I couldn't have done this if I'd tried."

"Then who did?" Larry asked bluntly.

"Search me," replied the detective. Still leaning against the wall he said, "Sure you don't know, Finlay?"

Larry shook his head. He was beginning to have some unhappy suspicions, but felt hardly free to voice them to authority as represented by Lieutenant Harvey. Nor did he think they'd be believed.

Harvey studied him with relaxed intentness, then said, "Maybe you better take a look at the bedroom. Maybe then you'll believe me."

IT WAS an even worse mess than the living room. The low-slung modern bed had actually been turned upside down and the coils of myriad mattress springs protruded from it like a field of metallic glass. The bureau had been literally torn into its component parts, the closet had been messed about, the pictures were down. Even more incredible was the fact that the steel safe had been plucked right out of the wall as if by a pair of giant tweezers and lay, burst open and empty on the floor.

"I'll be damned!" muttered Larry, feeling suddenly afraid. He recalled unhappily what Cornaman had told him of the paranormal powers of the Amazons. Certainly some sort of super-telekinesis must have been at work here. Otherwise the noise would have created a disturbance that would have roused the house attendants. Surely they would have summoned the police.

Suddenly suspicious, Larry looked at Lieutenant Harvey, who had followed and was standing in the doorway, watching him. He found the telephone, miraculously still intact, under a pile of two-hundred-dollar suits heaped carelessly beyond the overturned bed.

"Spring seven, oh-one-hundred," said the detective. Larry called anyway, got Homicide, called his uninvited guest to the phone, then checked his identity. Then, satisfied, he called the desk downstairs. No, there had been no report of any unusual noises or other disturbance from his apartment while he was gone.

Larry slammed the phone back on its cradle. He looked at Harvey with some idea of apologizing for his suspicions, but the detective forestalled him with, "In your place I'da done the same thing. Finlay, who do you think mangled this place?"

"Just one more call," said Larry. He dialed Mayne Cornaman's number. Dolores answered the phone, informed him that the fat man was out. Then she said, "How does it feel not to be a wanted man?"

"How do you mean that?" he countered, reading the mockery underlying Dolores' tone.

"Remind me to draw you a picture," she told him. "Any message?"

"Not to you, sweetheart," he said grimly and hung up. He led the way

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back to the living room, managed with Harvey's help to put a couple of chairs and a table in something like usable order. He said, "How'd you find out who I was, Lieutenant?"

Harvey looked at Larry with an expression of dour curiosity. He said, "The moment this Morgan character gives himself up for the Crady killing the Commissioner calls me in and gives me the dope on you. He won't tell me where he got it and gives me a hands-off sign."

"But you decided to come up on your own?" asked Larry.

"Right," Harvey nodded. "At least I wanted a look at you. And maybe a couple of answers if you're willing to give them."

"It's okay," said Larry, "but I'm beat. And there's all this mess. . . ." He gestured at the wreckage that surrounded them.

"I ought to be sore as hell at you," said Harvey ruminatively around his cigar. "I came here ready to be sore as hell at you. But when I saw this—" he jerked his head at the debris. "And you don't seem like a wrongo. What the devil *did* happen to you anyway?"

"I can't tell you all of it," said Larry. "If I could have I'd have turned myself in days ago and let you guys do your worst. There are a lot more factors involved than me or that poor girl at Columbia or this fellow Morgan who just gave up." He paused, added, "By the way, what's going to happen to *him?*"

Harvey shrugged, said, "I wish I knew—but I gotta hunch nothin' very terrible. The whole case is too screwed up. I thought surer than hell that one of you two would be an odd-ball, but it don't seem to be that way. Suppose you tell me what you think you can. Maybe I can fit in a few of the missing pieces myself."

"If you can," Larry informed him, "you're going to be talking to yourself in mirrors for a long time to come. This business is a lot screwier than even you think it is. Well, as far as I'm concerned the whole business started when a university in Boston bounced my thesis."

As Harvey started to say something Larry managed a tired grin and added, "No—not the one that turned up on Miss Crady's desk—"the one somebody just lifted out of that bedroom safe."

Lieutenant Harvey got up as if someone had stabbed him from beneath. He said, "I thought you told the Loring girl no documents were stolen. What was in this thesis anyway?"

"That version doesn't matter much now," Larry told him. "As to what's in it, it's a new theory about haemophiliacs—bleeders."

HARVEY subsided wearily and Larry went on to tell him about his decision to bring the work to Columbia, being careful to omit the names of Ned Tolman and Ida. He told of being followed; of being taken in charge by an unknown stranger, of what had happened outside the biology building. "When I tried to go my own way my friend clouted me cold and when I came to the lid was on."

Harvey looked at him narrowly and spoke with a trace of wistfulness, "I wish we could get you downtown, Finlay."

"That's one wish I won't go along with," Larry told him. "I suppose I could get you in trouble by reporting your visit here. Especially if I mentioned the shape I found the place in."

Harvey regarded him steadily for a long moment, then nodded. "Yeah," he said, "I suppose you could—a certain amount of trouble anyway. But I didn't mess this joint up."

"And I didn't kill Arlene Crady," said Larry. "What's more, I doubt like hell that Jonathan Morgan killed her. My guess is he was hypnotized the moment he set foot in that office."

Harvey looked his scorn, said, "And made to kill a girl he'd never seen before? Maybe I look dumb, Finlay—maybe most of us cops are dumb like the book says—but I'm not *that* dumb!"

"I just told you I don't think he killed her," said Larry.

"Then who did?" the detective wanted to know.

"My guess would be a woman," said

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Larry, wondering if he were talking too much. "Probably an attractive one. Why don't you see if you can find any who were around at the time?"

Harvey got up slowly, not troubling to hide his disgust. "I guess," he said wearily, "I spoke somewhat previous when I said you didn't look like an odd-ball. Okay, I'm goin'. You go ahead and have your nightcap with the cutie-pie next door."

Larry waited at his own door until the official had vanished behind the sliding doors of the elevators. Then he went across the hall and rapped softly on Toni Loring's door.

She opened it at once—evidently she had been waiting right behind it. She let him in, said, "Is the minion gone?" She was wearing a swishy blue moire housecoat, had her hair tied back with a silver ribbon. She looked enchantingly conspiratorial.

He followed her toward her kitchenette. "I can't say I'm not fascinated. You're going to have to give before I do."

They sat side by side on a low sofa and sipped good Bourbon on the rocks. After a while she said, "If you don't start talking I'm going to hit you over the head with a bottle or something. Who are you anyway? What are you?"

"I'm Larry Finlay," he informed her. "The so-called student who supposedly killed that girl up at Columbia last week."

"I kind of thought so," she said, her eyes steady on his, "when you almost dropped dead over that news story after dinner. You don't look much like your news pictures. You're much more attractive."

"I'm a doll," he said, grinning. "Funny—it seems I have to be on the lam for a murder I didn't commit to wind up with girls like you, Toni."

"*Very* funny," she retorted. "And what does that plural imply?"

"Nothing for you to worry about," he said, thinking of Dolores. Then he thought of Ida and wondered how to get in touch with her. Probably through Ned, he decided—though he wasn't yet ready to trust the reporter. As Toni reached for the bottle he added quickly, "No fooling, Toni—you're the one nice thing that's happened lately."

Her smile was quick and warm, her carmine-tipped fingers came up to touch his shoulder. She smelled enchantingly fragrant as she leaned closer and said huskily, "That, Larry Finlay, is more like it."

For a little while he was able to forget about the encircling ring of problems that still beset him. He was even able to forget how tired he was. And before he could remember he was asleep. . . .

VIII

LARRY was roused from an unpleasant dream in which he was floating downstream over vicious rapids, clinging desperately to a spongy log, while a large Amazon, clad in Dogpatch leopard skins, fired thunderous bursts at him from a sub-machine gun. He could see the bullets kick up little spurts of water as they came closer and closer to him. In vain he tried to work his way around the spongy log; the bullets came right on through it. . . .

He woke and found himself lying in bed, clutching tightly to a girl. For a moment he was bewildered, then in a fierce whisper Toni Loring said, "Stop shouting, Larry. They'll hear you!"

He said, "Ooomff! Sorry, darling." Then, "Hey, this *is* you, isn't it, Toni?" It was dark and the cotton wool of sleep still clouded his faculties.

She giggled softly and whispered, "How very flattering!" And, "Shut up!" A soft hand clamped over his opening mouth as a thunderous knocking sounded at the door.

Toni said, "Dammit, why don't they go away?"

Larry, coming fully awake, shook off her restraining clasp. "It's probably for me," he said, rubbing his eyes.

Her eyes peered at him darkly through the semi-gloom. She clutched his bare arm anew, said, "This is awfully embarrassing. I'd better go and tell them

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to go away."

But Larry was sure. Though fatigue enveloped him like a suit of old-fashioned long underwear he managed to stir himself. Toni, looking like a disturbed sprite in her housecoat, came floating back into the bedroom. She said, "He won't go 'way. Want me to call downstairs and have him thrown out? He wants you."

Larry worked one foot into a shoe, said, "Ummm—who is it?"

"Somebody named Bright," she replied.

He sighed, said, "Tell Dan I'll be right out." Catching her forlorn regard he put an arm around her slim waist, pulled her down on his lap, kissed her, said, "Don't worry, honey, I'll be back."

She kissed him fiercely. "I'll be waiting, darling—but don't keep me waiting too long." Then she slipped away, padpadded back to the foyer with his message. When Larry, pulling at his tie with one sleeve in his jacket, got there a moment later she put both hands on his chest and whispered, "Darn it, Larry—you're so mysterious! I don't know what I'm going to do about you."

He held her close for a moment, replied, "And I don't know what I'm going to do about you. At the moment all I can say is thanks—thanks for everything."

"Yes, it's been *fun,* hasn't it?" she countered bitterly.

He got out of there quickly, wished he'd had Toni have the house people send Dan Bright packing as she'd wanted to. For Mayne Cornaman's right bower was in a caustic rage. Back with Larry in the wreckage of his own apartment, Bright said, "When something like this happens you might let us know. Who did it?"

Larry shrugged, told him, "Don't ask me. When I got back from dinner I found it like this with Lieutenant Harvey of Homicide here. He said he didn't do it and I believe him. I called your place."

"What happened?" Dan Bright asked sharply.

"Dolores answered," said Larry. "So I hung up."

"You could of tried again," Dan Bright told him reproachfully. Then, with his anger once more on the rise. "The boss ain't gonna like this one bit."

"Oh, pipe down, Dan," said Larry, and for a moment was tempted to hit him. But a very sound idea of what Dan Bright could doubtless do to him physically, charged by memory of the single wallop that had knocked him cold outside the Columbia campus, held him in check. Bright, who had been staring at him, apparently read his thoughts. He said, gesturing at the debris about them, "What'd they get—anything?"

"The original thesis—and Mr. Cornaman's notes," said Larry.

Bright grunted and considered this, then shrugged and said, "Well, it's too late to worry now. Come on, we got to get goin'."

"Where to?" asked Larry. "I want to take a shower first."

"Take one when you get there," was the equivocal reply. And since Dan Bright seemed in no mood to vouchsafe further information Larry trotted along after him to the elevator. Downstairs a long, sleek, purple Cadillac convertible was awaiting them. Bright got behind the wheel and Larry slid into the front seat beside him. He said, "You could have given me a little more time to wake up."

Bright said, "Listen, macushla, time's something we ain't got," and tooled the car out of the apartment house entryway.

THEY rode in silence through the just-broken dawn over the Triboro Bridge and out along Northern Boulevard, on which the first stream of ingoing commuter traffic was just beginning to move against them. Larry calculated he must have had about six hours' sleep and wished he could get some more. But to his annoyance he was thoroughly awake. There was no sense in trying to strike up a conversation with his driver. Dan Bright was

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not much of a talker at the best of times —and at the moment he was disgusted with his charge.

As they rolled smoothly along Larry found himself beset with qualms. Instead of the hospitable Toni he found himself thinking of Ida Stevens with increasing guilt. After all, they had been everything but engaged before his departure from her Beacon Street apartment to bring his thesis to Columbia.

Compared to Ida, Toni, for all her dark-blonde loveliness and gaiety and clinging warmth, seemed somehow a little tawdry. His previous suspicions of Ida appeared absurd in the cold light of his awakening.

He had been a coward and a fool not to have approached Ida and Ned directly when he spotted them at Hilary Duggan's bar the night before. He could hardly imagine either of them betraying him to the police. Doubtless, out of devotion to him, they had come to New York upon learning of his trouble, had been seeking to find and help him if they could.

He had certainly given them meager return for their integrity—first by ducking out on them, then by being completely faithless to Ida, by permitting circumstances to trap him with the first girl to come along and bat an eyelash at him. He felt mighty low.

He came out of his abstraction to discover Dan Bright had stopped the convertible outside a diner. "What gives?" he asked.

"We stoke up," said Bright. "I been drivin' most of the night and you look like something that just came in off the back fence."

While Dan Bright stuck to a bowl of dry cereal and coffee Larry waded into a stack of wheatcakes with sausages and three cups of black coffee. He even found himself thinking regretfully of Mayne Cornaman's breakfast of kidneys in Madeira, huevas rancheros and pheasant with Canadian bacon.

"Come on," Bright said impatiently when he had finished, "we ain't got all day—and there's still a long way to go."

So they went eastward beneath the rising sun of a pleasant day. It was after nine o'clock when they left the highway to proceed along leafy Long Island byways between high hedges and white-painted paddock fences, finally to turn left and travel along a winding crushed stone driveway that brought them at last under the porte cochere of an immense ivy-covered red-brick mansion.

The butler who came to the door seemed to be expecting Larry. He said, "Mr. Finlay?"—and, at Larry's nod—"This way please." He led Larry over soft carpets through what seemed several hundred yards of room to a french-windowed sun porch overlooking a stretch of emerald velvet lawn that in turn overlooked the glittering blue-gray surface of Long Island Sound.

There, at a white-clothed table, Mayne Cornaman, immense in white linens that

[Turn page]

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for some reason reminded Larry of Mark Twain, was stuffing himself from a platter heaped with lamb chops and grilled tomatoes while a lean, sunburned short-featured man with pale blue eyes and hair like steel wool, watched him.

"Sit down, Larry," said Cornaman, gesturing with a fork toward an empty chair. "Phil, this is Larry Finlay—Larry, Phil Whittaker."

LARRY gulped and nodded and sat down. So this, he thought, was the famous Dean Whittaker of Columbia. He eyed his host with new interest and respect, noted the lines of character in the bronzed face, the casual wrinkles of humor at the corners of mouth and eyes, the square, lumpy intelligence of the forehead.

Whittaker said, "I listened to your thesis last night, Finlay. A most remarkable piece of work."

"Thank you, sir," said Larry, coloring, "but in its present form it's as much Mr. Cornaman's as it is mine."

The fat man laid down his silver with a clatter, sprayed food as he tried to speak with his mouth full of food, wound up coughing. Recovered he roared, "Don't you believe it, Phil—all I gave him were a few more corroborative cases from my own files. Well, what are you waiting for? Make him a Ph.D. Can't you see he isn't going to be of the slightest use to us until he's stopped worrying about *that?*"

Dean Whittaker's smile was almost shy. He said, as Cornaman got back to his eating, "Since you come so well-recommended and your thesis, while not yet in proper form, shows signs of originality both of concept and research, I don't think you'll have to worry."

"Thank you, sir," said Larry gratefully. Oddly enough, now that he had accomplished what he set out to do when he first began work on haemophilia, the degree no longer seemed especially important. Yet it *was* a relief to know he had accomplished his purpose. And the prestige of a degree from Columbia was more than he had hoped to win.

Mayne Cornaman again dropped his silver. This time he said, "For the love of God, do you both have to be so stinking polite? We've got us a job ahead and we're all in it together. Let's drop the formality, shall we, Phil? This is a good kid—I dare say he's further along than you were at his age if not as far along as me."

"All right, Mayne," said Dean Whittaker. Then, to Larry, with the ghost of a smile, "We'd better do as he says, Larry."

"I'll try—Phil," said Larry with a gulp. Then, as the silence continued unbroken save by the steady munching of the fat man's jaws, he said, "My place was broken into last night. Whoever did it got away with the original thesis and your notes, Mayne."

Cornaman's chewing went on without a break. Then he swallowed, washed down some six ounces of champagne, said, "Good—that means we're still ahead of them—if not by much. Where were you?"

Larry blushed, replied, "Taking my next-door neighbor out to dinner at Hilary Duggan's."

Mayne Cornaman's regard was unblinkingly shrewd. Then he grunted, said, "Oh, the pretty model! Dan told me about her. Watch your step, young man. We haven't had a chance to check up on her."

Cornaman went back to his eternal-eating and Dean Whittaker asked Larry some questions about how he came to write his thesis and how he had gone about the research that led to his discoveries. Larry replied as best he could. He had a feeling that the fat man and his host were marking time, waiting for someone or something. Finally he asked if he could use the phone, was directed to an instrument in a book-lined study off the living room.

Since it appeared evident the enemy knew the location of his hideout he saw little sense in keeping it a secret. He called Ned Tolman's old New York paper, obtained from the city editor the news that Ned was definitely still in the

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city and the address of his hotel, a small place on Madison Avenue in the fifties. He then called the hotel, discovered Ned was out, left a message, asking him to call that evening at the ransacked apartment.

WHEN Larry got back to the sun porch he discovered that one of the most important men in America had joined the party. Gray-haired, gray-suited, gray-faced, Leon Brett was almost a legendary figure. Born to wealth, he had been expensively educated, left a virtual pauper when his father went bankrupt in the Great Depression of 1931. By Pearl Harbor time, thanks to his all-around brilliance, Brett was probably richer, despite taxes, than his father had ever been.

Too important to be allowed in uniform, he had managed to get under fire in virtually all theaters of World War Two, had played an immensely vital role not only in co-ordination of logistics, but in the intricate webwork of international diplomacy. Now, still under fifty, he was a sort of unofficial advisor to the President, a latter-day Colonel House of vastly more significance.

When Larry appeared and was introduced he said, studying him, "This the boy?" And, at Mayne Cornaman's nod, "Finlay, you probably don't know it but everyone you've ever known does. We've managed a pretty complete check on you in the last few days."

"That's where the murder came in handy," rumbled the fat man. "They thought Leon's bird dogs were cops."

"How did I come out?" Larry asked, bewildered.

"All right," said Leon Brett. He turned to the older men, seemed to have brushed aside Larry's existence, told them, "This thing shows signs of getting out of hand if we don't stop it immediately. Recent reports—and these are one hundred per cent reliable—seem to indicate that someone is actually inaugurating germ warfare behind the Iron Curtain. As yet it's on a small scale, but there's no reason to think Uncle Joe's boys are doing it just to stir up anti-American feeling—though that's how they're interpreting it, of course."

He spoke crisply, lucidly, seeming to have the happy faculty of plunging like a carving knife into the juiciest part of his subject and laying it bare on the platter for others to see as clearly as himself. Whittaker and Cornaman exchanged significant glances and the fat man said, "I don't suppose it'll do much good now to remind you I've been warning you of something like this for years."

"Not a bit," said Leon Brett, unabashed. "We may have been burrheads about it—but who can blame us?"

"I can," said Mayne Cornaman savagely, pushing his immense belly back from the table. "What are you going to do about it?"

"What we can," said Brett soberly. "Unfortunately the President isn't yet convinced of your version of this conspiracy. He's giving me some leeway, but the military is still under wraps. I don't see how we can convince *them.*"

"I wonder," mused the fat man, "why the military seems to be a pool for the lowest IQ's in the nation?"

"Oh, they're not so bad," replied Leon Brett. "What do you think would be the reaction of the man in the street if we laid the facts before him? He'd think all of us were nuts."

"He'd be right too," said Dean Whittaker. "However, we aren't quite as mad as these unbelievable women. All right, Leon, how *do* you propose to stop them?"

Brett got up and walked to the French windows, his hands clasped behind his back. Then, turning suddenly to face them, he said, "Gentlemen, I don't know. What we have discovered is that our female friends have a headquarters of some kind, one from which this whole world-wide campaign is being directed. I'm convinced, through a number of highly technical clues, that this headquarters is somewhere on or close to this continent, perhaps this country itself."

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Cornaman grunted assent, said, "How do you propose to find it, Leon? With a dowser?"

The great man's face seemed to sink upon itself. He said, "Frankly, I haven't the ghost of an idea. I've got to the place where I even suspect the President's wife—hell, I even suspect my own. I'm leaving it up to you gentlemen to come up with a clue."

Cornaman made no effort to disguise his gloat. He chuckled and said to Dean Whittaker, "Well, Phil, what shall we do—follow our original plan?"

Whittaker, unsmiling, nodded. Leon Brett said, "Let me repeat; as things shape up now we may not have much time."

"I think perhaps we can help you," said the fat man. "Tell me, Leon—have your operatives come up with an instance in which our friends actually employed murder to gain their ends?"

"No . . ." Brett shook his gray head doubtfully, added, "unless you except this germ warfare. Oh—and that murder at Columbia. . . ."

"Exactly," said Mayne Cornaman. Larry suddenly found himself the focus of three pairs of singularly intent eyes. The fat man gave him an indulgent look, remarked, "Well, Larry, it looks as if you're it!"

IX

LARRY'S drive back to the city that afternoon with Dan Bright was as silent as the drive out had been—but this time he was silent not because of his chauffeur's ill-humor but out of his own bewilderment. For the first time since Mayne Cornaman had stepped in and taken charge of his affairs he was actually frightened.

The great scientist, after announcing Larry was "it" had gone on to explain, as much to his colleagues as to Larry, "In some way this young man has stumbled into a soft spot, something close to the heart of this conspiracy we are trying to lick."

Dean Whittaker had then put in, "But Mayne, I don't see how this thesis of his could so upset them. After all, it's hardly likely to get much publicity or even credence where it counts—outside of ourselves. The newspaper publicity which followed the Crady murder has forestalled that."

"A good point, Phil," Leon Brett had said quietly.

But Mayne Cornaman had outsmiled their protests, had said finally, "I have a pretty solid hunch as to why they're afraid of Larry. I'm not certain enough to tell even you, but I'll lay you any odds you want he's closer to the core of this conspiracy than any of us. He's the boy who's going to find that headquarters."

"But why me?" Larry had asked. "And how am I to do it?"

He had spent the rest of his stay at Dean Whittaker's Long Island estate seeking the answers to those two questions—including a two-hour time-out while Mayne Cornaman devoured two lobsters stuffed with pâté de foie gras, an entire turkey complete with sage and chestnut stuffing and a quadruple baked Alaska for dessert.

Now, riding back to town, he had not the slightest idea whether in the course of his long briefing, he had been given the answers or not. At one point in the proceeding he had, with some reluctance, confessed his call to Ned Tolman's hotel. And Mayne Cornaman had simply beamed and nodded as if it were the most natural thing in the world, had in fact seemed pleased.

"You must remember," had been his parting admonition, "that you are the only one of us outside of myself—and that was years ago—who has actually driven our opponents to violent action. We have agreed that the material in your thesis is not a factor—or at any rate not the main factor—in causing this violence.

"Therefore, Larry, it must be something more personal. You are or have been operating close to the center of this conspiracy. As I have implied, I think I know in a general way where this soft

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spot lies. But I'm not sure—I don't see the actual connection."

"What do you want me to do again?" Larry had asked helplessly.

"Don't go looking for them—and don't avoid them," the fat man had told him. "Be available, that's all. And be careful, young man. You're just about our only hope of a quick solution. Above all, keep your eyes open every waking minute. I have an idea the rest will take care of itself. Now good-by and good luck. I shall be back in the city tomorrow. Dan will drive you back."

What had sounded like an exciting and possibly dangerous assignment at first had apparently dwindled to a sort of lackadaisical milk run, in which he sat around and waited for something to happen. He mulled it over and over in the convertible, finally found his thoughts were beginning to wander.

Oddly enough he dismissed Toni with only a quick reverie appreciation of her beauty, charm and amiability of the evening before. It had been, he decided, just a peccadillo, a sly pleasant little operation of fate he could hardly have managed differently without, to put it mildly, downright rudeness.

He thought a lot more about Ida. If only he had seen the headlines announcing the confession of Jonathan Morgan *before* he took Toni to dinner, he would have felt free to approach Ida and Ned in Hilary Duggan's. With a pang of guilt it occurred to him for the first time that there had been nothing to stop him from going back there as soon as he had read the story. He must have been too numbed with fatigue—or was it more than that?

Larry wondered. Ever since Ida had set herself against his pursuing the subject of the thesis that was now to win him his degree from Columbia he had felt an element of distrust—a distrust that had been increased rather than lessened by the subsequent knowledge of an Amazonian conspiracy.

IT WAS time, of course, that he and Ida settled a few things. He wondered if she actually were a daughter of the Amazons, decided as he had that morning such was scarcely possible. After all, not all women carried the dominant strain—very few of them in fact. Dolores Green was awash with Amazonian characteristics, he was perfectly willing to accept her as one, but Ida or Toni were both normal girls.

When it came to Ned Tolman Larry was still undecided. After all, it had been Ned who had abetted him in his course of action toward the thesis, who had egged him along. But wouldn't such behavior run directly counter-current to that of the conspiracy? He began to wonder if the whole business were not a strange phantasm dreamed up by the food-warped brain of Mayne Cornaman.

Then he thought of the murdered girl in the biology building, of the bewildered young man who had given himself up for the crime, of the incredible silent violence with which his apartment had been literally torn to pieces the night before, of the presence of such men as Dean Whittaker and especially Leon Brett at the conference that day. No, it was all real enough.

One of Mayne Cornaman's theories, propounded after his tremendous lunch, had been frightening. He had suggested that the conspirators were taking action not so much because they feared world destruction via A or H-bomb warfare as because they were approaching solution to the problem of parthenogenesis.

"After all," he had stated, "if I could at least get on the trail of a workable process, they could have found one of their own in the past twenty years. I may be something of a genius, but unfortunately I'm not the only genius operating. Nor, despite popular sentiment, is genius an exclusively male property."

Larry shivered as he recalled the fat man's words. One of Mayne Cornaman's most terrifying traits was his refusal to permit himself an iota of wishful thinking, even under extreme pressure. It was one of the things that made him so shocking. He voiced only what he knew to be true, not what others wished to

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hear. Curiously enough, such candor gave him an aura almost of madness. Yet Larry was becoming increasingly sure that the fat man might well be a lone island of sanity in a crazy world.

His thoughts went back to Ida, to her fineness and loyalty, to her near-beauty that was more than beauty, to his own intentions of making up to her for the trouble he must have caused her. He was still thinking of her when he walked from the elevator to his apartment and found the door ajar.

This was probably the reason why he halted on the threshold and blinked stupidly at Toni Loring, who sat cross-legged on the floor resewing a piece of damaged upholstery. Finally he said, "Hey! You aren't supposed to be doing that."

"A gal's got to do something when there's no man around the house," Toni said brightly. She rose a trifle stiffly, pirouetted and showed him the results of her work. "How'm I doin', stranger?"

"Great!" said Larry. He kissed her and it didn't exactly come under the heading of hard work, even with his current thoughts about Ida.

Actually, thanks to Toni's efforts, most of the surface damage done by the house-wrecker of the night before was undone. He grinned and pulled her close against him and she looked up at him and pushed back her blonde hair and said with a trace of anxiety, "Then you don't mind my coming in and doing this on my own?"

"Toni, I love it!" he told her. Then, "Now beat it for a bit—I've got to dunk what one young lady recently called my beautiful pagan body—bowlegs and all."

"Tell me who she is—and I'll scratch her eyes out," said Toni. Then, when Larry laughed, she asked, "Darling, who's Ned—is he crazy?"

Larry grinned, then straightened his face and said ponderously, "There are at least a dozen schools of thought on that. When did he call?"

"About half an hour ago," Toni said, frowning. "I let the phone ring for a while and then I thought it might be you and I answered it. He said it was Ned and was I your new houri and I told him he ought to have his mouth washed out with soap and he said if I'd wash it out for him he'd blow iridescent bubbles to amuse me and let me dance around in cheesecloth while he blew bubbles on a pipe."

SHE paused for breath, then went on with, "So I thought I'd better break him up and asked him what days he took in washing and he said half-past six and he and someone named Ida would be at Hilary Duggan's at that time and that if I didn't bring you over they'd come over here and wreck the joint."

"Hold on," said Larry. "You mean Ned and Ida want me to bring you over there at half-past six." He looked at his watch, considering the possibilities of this unexpected development, saw it was already ten to six, told Toni to beat it and dress herself while he took his shower.

She said, "Can't I hold the soap?"

"You might wash my mouth out with it," he reminded her, pushing her toward the door. She was, he thought as the water poured over him, a thoroughly delightful if not-so-little minx. Then he thought of the fix Ned had got him into by bringing the two girls together. All in all it was a typical Ned Tolman play. He grinned through the cascading water even while silently cursing the newspaperman.

He shaved and got dressed in a matter of fifteen minutes but when he opened the door of his apartment Toni was already emerging from hers. She was wearing a blue dress with brown-and-gold trim that added immeasurably to her already remarkable vividness. In her presence it was a little hard for him to visualize Ida.

She made a face at him, said, "And I thought *I* was a quick-change artist. Good! You're wearing the sharkskin suit."

"You seem to have even my clothing catalogued," he remarked as he took her

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arm and they moved toward the elevator.

"Why not?" She laughed up at him. "After spending the day trying to put your apartment to rights. Did you have a nice time wherever you were?"

"Not exactly nice—but interesting," he replied. "You make me feel like a heel for letting you do the work."

"Don't be an idiot, Larry," she said. "After all, it was my own idea. And I enjoyed it. I'm really a domestic animal."

Again they walked to the restaurant. By standing back so that Toni could enter first Larry was able to disengage himself from her. He felt more than a little uncomfortable about what lay ahead. But at sight of him Ned Tolman, shaggy and unlikely as ever, broke away from the bar and grabbed Larry and, after greeting him, seized Toni by the shoulders and said, "Is this the leprechaun that stood me on my ear over the phone? Faith and she looks like a crashing colleen!"

Toni dimpled and said, "I wish I could say the same of you," and from then on was gobbled up in a Niagara of Tolman persiflage. With a grateful look at the newspaperman, Larry was able to go to Ida at least temporarily without entanglements.

She waited for him to come to her and the tasteful simplicity of her black dress, the simplicity with which her glowing brown hair was done, the lack of extravagant makeup on her face made Toni by comparison seem a little flashy, a little cheap.

She didn't offer to kiss him, but relief and affection glowed in her eyes and she extended her hands to clasp his. She said, "Larry, I can't tell you how glad I was when Ned told me he'd found a message from you at his hotel. We've been out of our minds looking for you. It must have been awful."

He said, "It's been—well, bizarre is more the word, I'm afraid. And until I saw the papers last night I couldn't even try to get in touch with you. I'd caused you enough trouble already."

"Larry!" The word was a reproach. "Lots of people have been asking questions about you but I didn't mind that. I've been almost sick with worry ever since that Crady girl got killed."

LOOKING closely at her, even in the astutely flattering dimness of Hilary Duggan's lighting, Larry could see the signs of recent strain and sleeplessness in dark shadows under her eyes, in a certain tenseness of expression he didn't remember previously. He said, "I guess I should have taken your advice. But, darling, I just heard today that Columbia is accepting my thesis."

For a moment she looked dismayed, then said, "It's wonderful, Larry—but I don't understand how there's been time. . . ."

"It's happened though," he told her. "I've just come from a session with Dean Whittaker."

"What's all this?" asked Ned, coming up with Toni on his other side. "Still worrying about that thesis, Larry?"

"Not any more," he replied. "It's in."

For a moment even Ned looked dazed. Then he began to pump Larry's hand vigorously, said, "Well, into each life a little champagne must fall. Chemistry's loss is biology's gain. Nice going, Larry, though I don't see how you managed it under the circumstances."

Toni looked at him with one eyebrow slightly raised, then at Ida, then back to him. They had a drink and talked things over and then the girls adjourned for a powder-room skirmish while Ned and Larry got a table. Across the board Ned looked at him and said, "Here I've been expecting to get a much-needed facial depilation by using the shine on that old suit of yours as a mirror. And I find you looking like a latter-day Beau Brummel, a twentieth-century Lucius Beebe. Man, you must have fallen right into a vatful of lard."

"It's all absolutely insane," Larry told him. "I seem to have started a chain reaction of events when I took off from Boston."

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"It looks like a sort of uphill primrose path to me," said Ned shaking his head. "I've been expecting to see you in jail."

"It was swell of you and Ida to rally round this way," said Larry sincerely. "Seriously, Ned, how's Ida taking it?"

He made a grimace at his glass, said, "Hard—and maybe I made a mistake having this little nesselrode pie of yours come over with you. Ida's a swell girl, Larry, a thoroughbred." He paused.

"I know it," said Larry. "Don't worry about Toni. She's just the girl who lives next door. My place got messed up by the police and she was fixing it up for me when you called. I was seeing Dean Whittaker and learning about my thesis."

"I figured it must be something like that," Ned told him. "But I had to be sure. You see, Larry, there's a thing or two about Ida I don't believe you understand. Oh-oh, here they come. Get down to my place tomorrow at ten and I'll go into details then."

The girls sat down with a sort of mutual wariness. Each in her own way, Larry thought, was a stunner. He supposed he ought to consider himself a lucky man, but all he could think of was the Chinese symbol for the word trouble—two women-symbols under a broken line that symbolized a single roof. If that was trouble he had it.

It was while they ordered dinner that it happened. If Larry's eyes were more watchful than usual it was not because of Mayne Cornaman's warning, rather concern lest a touchy situation get out of hand. But he was very much on the alert. And when, after the waiter had taken their orders and Toni stuck a cigarette in her mouth and looked around for a light, he saw Ida watching her, saw the lighter in Toni's purse rise to meet her groping fingers of its own volition. He saw Ida's blue eyes narrow in concentration as the lighter moved to Toni's fingers, so slightly that she appeared not to notice.

It was a hammer-blow—for certainly it was an example of telekinesis, the ability to move objects by willing them to move. He recalled what Mayne Cornaman had told him of the psi powers of the Amazon women, of what he had discovered himself, of their secret recognition test-signs. All of his earlier suspicions of Ida came back with compound interest added. But which girl had willed it. How could he tell.

Later, when Ned, to celebrate their reunion, Larry's freedom and the acceptance of his thesis, suggested they keep the champagne flowing, Larry set about getting drunk as quickly and thoroughly as he could.

X

THE next morning Dan Bright did not knock on Toni's door and wake Larry up. It was full morning when he sat up and moaned and found Toni lying beside him, her one visible eye looking up at him through a thicket of blonde hair. He said, "Holy cow, honey! I must have been drinking mule liquor last night. What a head!"

She pulled down the sheet to reveal the lush fullness of her mouth, said, "You opened fire with champagne. Then you laid down a barrage of Scotch mists. After that you scattered your shots. I seem to remember an absinthe frappé, a number of tequilla Swiss itches and a salvo of brandy-and-sodas. I've got a hangover just from watching you. *Brrrrh!*"

He moaned, then laughed in spite of his discomfort. This girl had an originality of expression that amounted almost to quaintness. Even seen thus in the morning she was vivid and warm and lovely. He wondered, in the light of what had happened during the past week, if he could have got through it without her. A sudden surge of affection swept through him and he lay down again and gathered her into his arms. She came willingly, even eagerly, with soft laughter.

When he happened to look at the traveling clock on the bedside table he saw that it was ten fifteen. All at once he recalled his date with Ned Tolman,

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which brought back sharply the reason behind his sudden desire to lose himself in drink the night before.

Without closing his eyes he could still see Toni's cigarette lighter leap from the purse to her outstretched fingers, could see the look of intense concentration on Ida's face. Toni hadn't been looking—it would have seemed to her that she had merely found the lighter lying in the purse, and had picked it up herself.

So Ned had something to tell him about Ida—well, Toni had an item to trade with him about his former girl. He scrambled into the same clothes he had worn the night before. There was no time to worry about a change of clothes.

Toni clung to him at the door, said, "You won't be long?"

"No longer than I can help," he replied honestly. At the moment this girl, so recently an utter stranger, was the one reality to which he could cling. And he was sorely in need of her. He gave her an affectionate kiss and hurried away.

Ned's hotel was a refurbished, fifty-year-old, narrow-fronted structure of red-and-white brick that looked oddly old-fashioned beside the aggressively chaste office buildings that flanked it. But the interior was pleasantly dim and cool and the elevator was of swift, recent vintage.

Larry found Ned's door and knocked, then knocked again, harder. The door gave a little under his knuckles and he discovered it was not latched.

Inside the door Larry looked numbly at the scene before him. Only half-consciously he took in the details of the room itself. It was a comfortable chamber, larger than the cubicles of more modern hostelries. The bed was made, its rust-colored brocade spread in harmony with the lighter hue of the walls. To his left was a faintly-tinted print of pioneer bicyclers in Central Park, above a Palladian marble mantel beneath which was a fireplace adorned with unpainted Hessian andirons and neatly laid artificial logs.

NED TOLMAN lay on his face on the floor with the back of his head bashed in. Hair and flesh and blood and bones and brains lay mixed in a ghastly pudding that had overflowed onto the pale green flowered carpet. He was in his shirtsleeves—his coat had been draped carefully over the back of a chair.

Beside him, on its back, a gilt-bronze and marble ormolu clock lay ticking remorselessly away. Bronze horses reared on either side of the dial, their forelegs joining the dial-frame, their hind-legs rooted in the marble base. It must, Larry thought aimlessly as he looked at it, weigh all of twenty to twenty-five pounds.

That the clock had killed him was evident. One of its sharp granite corners was spread like some surrealist canape with the same grisly mixture that had flowed from Ned's skull onto the carpet. Its hands pointed to four minutes of eleven, clicked as the minute hand moved another notch nearer the hour.

As if drawn by a magnet Larry moved to the mantel. There, upon the marble surface, was a rectangle of dustless space where the bottom of the clock must have been only a short time before. Larry wondered, appalled, at the strength of a murderer who could wield such a heavy weapon silently and expertly enough to catch Ned Tolman from behind and kill him.

Then he became aware of a faint clinging smell his consciousness had only half-registered earlier. It was sweet and heavy, a little animal in base—yet definitely feminine. He sniffed again and found it increasingly elusive. Either his nostrils were becoming accustomed to it or it was fading while he stood there.

His stomach went into violent revolt and Larry was grateful he had not eaten breakfast. At once memory recalled a vivid picture of Mayne Cornaman indulging in one of his giant repasts and he felt cold sweat burst out all over him.

He knew he should call somebody and report Ned's murder—for there could be

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no question of accident or suicide, even to his untutored eyes. Yet he did not know whether the fat man was still in Long Island or on his way back to town—and he had no wish to talk to the languorous Dolores. If he called Lieutenant Harvey or the hotel desk? No, neither move would accomplish much at this point.

Poor Ned—at least he was certain now that his friend had been on the side of the angels. And Ned had wanted to talk to him about Ida—tell him something he ought to know. Larry had a grim idea of what sort of information the newspaperman had planned to give him. He knew, suddenly, that Ned had been one of Cornaman's agents.

That alone would explain his traveling to Boston to take up a lesser job. It would, if Ida were an important member of the Amazonian conspiracy, explain his hanging around her. It would also explain his urging Larry to write the haemophilia thesis, his quick theorization of a fantastic conspiracy when the thesis was rejected.

Larry said, "Damn them!" under his breath and a sudden surge of hatred swept over him, almost causing his vision to blank out. They had killed Ned to prevent him from talking about Ida—but how had they known about his appointment of the morning?

Larry began to feel sicker. He had been drunk last night, as drunk if not drunker than ever before in his life. He had been with Ida much of the evening. Wasn't it probable that he had talked? He turned and stumbled out of there, closing the door tightly behind him, struggled for self control while the elevator rose to his summons.

He dug out the gold-cornered wallet, found within it the address Ida had given him the night before. It was on Sutton Place. He got into a cab, gave the driver the address and lit a cigarette with shaking fingers as he tried to organize his thoughts. He knew, as surely as he sat on the leather taxi cushions, that Ned had been murdered by telekinesis

He felt fear as he stood atop the iron-railed front steps that led to Ida's front door; he felt terribly alone and vulnerable. Instinctively, before his hand went to the push-button, he glanced upward, his eyes seeking loose cornices or bits of heavy ornamentation that might be induced to drop upon him.

HE WAS extending his forefinger to push the button when the heavy black wooden door was opened from within. Ida stood there, looking pale and frozen as he himself felt. Wordlessly she stood aside for him to enter, closed the door behind him, led him through an elegant hall into a small, sparsely luxurious sitting room.

There she said, "Larry—what's happened. You look—" Her voice broke off as she watched him anxiously.

He said, "You knew I was coming here—how?"

Her shoulders, unusually broad for a girl, sagged. In a small voice she told him, "I suppose I could say I saw you from a window. But I knew—I almost always know things like that."

His thoughts ranged backward over the time he had known her. There had been other incidents—the time he had forgotten to bring the beer to a South Shore picnic and Ida had smilingly produced it from the back of the car—the time he had received an unexpected day off and found her waiting at Mrs. Bemis'—the time . . but there had been so many of them, all put down to coincidence. Unquestionably Ida was telepathic, if not clairvoyant. It meant another nail in the coffin of evidence he was building around her.

He said, "Do you know Ned's been killed?"

Her face drained of color, leaving her lipstick a ghastly blotch of distortion. She said, "When, Larry—how'd it happen?"

"Not long ago—I just found him," he replied. "It was telekinesis. But I don't know why I have to tell you."

She uttered a small wordless sound—as if he had driven a stake through her

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heart. She said, "Oh, Larry—I didn't dream—they weren't supposed to. . . ." Abruptly, the back of a hand against her mouth, she shrank into a small armchair.

"Who wasn't supposed to what?" he countered grimly.

"She promised—she promised none of my friends would suffer," was the reply.

He lit a cigarette and his hands were no longer shaking. He said, "I see. None of your friends are supposed to suffer. So first my thesis is bounced, then a perfectly harmless girl is killed and a decent young fellow is in jail for killing her simply because I tried to bring the damned thing here. And now Ned's been murdered because he wanted to talk to me about you. But why should I bother telling you—you probably know it already with your damned telepathy or clairvoyance or whatever other paranormal powers you have."

"But I'm not clairvoyant," she said. "If I could have foreseen any of this I'd have—I'd have done something to stop it. Can't you see what it's doing to me?"

"You'll survive, never fear," he told her bitterly. "Arlene Crady didn't, Ned didn't, maybe I won't—but you *will*. Just who and what are you anyway, Ida? A witch—a ghoul?"

This time her cry was louder. She looked at him as if she wanted to burst into tears, but no tears would come. She said, her voice low, "Give me a cigarette, will you Larry?"

Automatically he gave her one, even held the lighter for her. He said, "I suppose you didn't foresee any of this when you tried to get me to tear up my thesis. It was you who got it bounced in Boston, wasn't it?"

She nodded mutely, then burst out with, "But can't you see how hard I tried to make up for having to do it? Can't you see that I've loved you right along, darling? Can't you—" She stopped, made a helpless gesture, added, "Oh, what's the use?"

"And you're not clairvoyant, I suppose," he told her acidly. Even in his current condition he had to fight the pull this girl exerted over him, the desire to hold her close and comfort and protect her. That, he thought, was a laugh—protecting *her!*

"No, I'm not," she replied stoutly. "Sometimes I can read people's thoughts—if they're awfully close to me. I used to know most of what you were thinking, Larry. Maybe that's why I fell in love with you, why I was willing to wait until you overcame all your ridiculous scruples about loving a rich girl."

Because of his rocketing emotions he said savagely, "That still doesn't answer my question! *Who and what are you?*"

She turned her face away as if he had struck her. Then she said unevenly, "I don't know just who or what I am, Larry. You see, I don't even know who my parents were. All I know is I was brought here by my grandmother. She's given me everything though I don't even know for certain she is my grandmother. All she asked was that I do occasional things she asked me to do. . . ."

"Like reporting on my thesis—or that I was coming here to New York with it—or that Ned and I were to talk about you this morning," he said. "That sort of thing?"

She nodded mutely, then told him, "Grandmother's not the sort of woman you can disobey. She—well, you just can't, that's all."

"Where is she?" Larry asked. "I'd like to have about five minutes alone with her."

"It wouldn't do you any good," she stated. "Besides, Grandmother's down on the island. If she'd been here she'd never have let this happen. Believe me, darling, I know."

"I wonder," said Larry. "But what are you going to do about Ned—and about me."

SHE struck a thigh with her fist, cried, "I don't know, Larry! Can't you see I'm as upset as you are? I'm going to have to go to her and get it all straightened out." Then, with an impulsive gesture, "Come with me, Larry. She's got to know about us."

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"What makes you think she doesn't know?" Larry asked drily.

"Because she wouldn't let—" Ida began, then her voice broke and the color, which had begun to return to her face, vanished with it. She added, her voice tiny, "Because I know she wouldn't have let any of this happen." And, rising and coming to Larry and putting her hands on his shoulders, "Even if she does know about this she doesn't know *you*. When she sees how much my happiness depends on you she'll—oh, darling, you've got to come with me. You'll love it out there. I've always wanted you there with me but I never had the courage to ask you before."

"Besides," he said drily, "it might be very convenient to have both you and me out of the country. This fabulous island of your grandmother's *is* out of the country isn't it?"

"What do you mean?" she asked almost fiercely in her fright.

"I mean, with Ned getting killed on top of the Crady murder, the police might want to ask some embarrassing questions," he said.

She struck him. Since she was a strong girl with plenty of athletic training, her open hand left a sharp sting. But Larry refused to lift his fingers to the hurt. He just looked at her until she covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

He felt like a heel. But he thought of Ned lying on the floor in a welter of his own brains in a hotel room downtown and said, "Okay, Ida, I guess this is it." He turned to walk out.

At once she seized him from behind, swung him around, said, "Darling, I'm sorry—I'd never have done that if I hadn't been counting on you so. I'm frightened sick and when you came here I thought I could at least count on you. I *do* love you and I'd rather be dead than have hurt you. Your poor cheek!" She put a hand against the place she had slapped.

"I don't have to tell you what I'm thinking," he told her, "since you can read my mind."

"Not now," she said bitterly. "Not when you're hating me like this. It would make me sick." She stepped back from him and seemed to gather herself together, said, "All right, maybe you can't help the things you're thinking about me. I can't blame you—it's just that they come as a shock."

"So did finding Ned," he told her savagely.

"I know!" she said. "And maybe I have no right to ask you to visit Grandmother with me. But I'll do it alone—I'll go there this afternoon. I'll be there tomorrow and we can straighten everything out, I'm sure of it." Then, after a pause, lifting downcast eyes, "You're sure you won't come along with me, darling?"

"Frankly," he told her, "I wouldn't dare."

He left her there, stricken, hands dangling at her sides as if she had forgotten how to make them obey the commands of her mind—or as if her mind lacked purpose to command. He was going to have to see Mayne Cornaman as soon as possible.

Outside, as he set out for Mayne Cornaman's house, he saw a colorless little man, who wore one shoulder higher than the other and hid his eyes behind thick-lensed glasses, duck out of sight in an areaway across the street. It was the same little man who had followed him from Boston with the thesis, the same little man Dan Bright had disposed of so neatly on the sidewalk outside Columbia.

XI

LARRY hailed a cab, told the driver to take him North under the bridge for a few blocks. Satisfied he was not followed he ordered the man to drive him to Mayne Cornaman's house, which was only a hop, skip and jump from Sutton Place. He wondered what the odd little man had been doing there. Had he tailed Larry from Ned's hotel, or was he simply on duty outside Ida's grandmother's house to take note of arrivals

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and departures? Larry gave it up, but the little man's presence was an added source of uneasiness.

Dolores answered his ring. She looked astonishingly handsome in a clinging green woolen dress that stressed the willowy lines of her long torso. She regarded him with a sardonic flicker of long-lashed eyelids, said, "Come on in. The boss isn't back yet so what shall we play—canasta?"

He ignored the remark and the equivocal invitation that had prompted it, asked brusquely, "When will Mr. Cornaman be here?"

"Would you believe me if I told you?" she countered, opening the door to the fat man's study and beckoning him in with a lateral motion of her well-shaped head. "Remember—I'm a spy!"

He said rudely, "Oh, shut up!" and flopped in a chair. Dolores shrugged shapely shoulders and sat down in another. She picked up a book from a small table beside it, settled down to read.

Although he tried with increasing desperation to apply himself to mental organization of the events of the day so that he could offer a coherent report to Mayne Cornaman when he arrived. Larry found it almost impossible to concentrate. He began to wonder if the stress and strain of the hectic week past had unhinged his balance. Never before, save in very special instances, had the mere presence of an attractive female prevented him from marshalling his thoughts.

Yet, though she appeared to be paying him no attention, Dolores proved unbearably disturbing. It was the more upsetting because he definitely didn't like her, despite her appeal. There was a contemptuously half-veiled cruelty lying close below the smooth, nacreous surface of her skin that actually scared him.

He tried to tell himself that he was letting his nerves run away with him like an old woman. Even if Dolores were one of the enemy, even though she probably possessed paranormal powers, there was neither rhyme nor reason in letting her frighten him. Yet she did.

Furthermore it was something special about her that was putting the vacuum of fear beneath his ribs. He frowned at her, seeking its source. Certainly it did not lie in her looks—seated there reading she might have been any unusually pretty girl.

He ground out his cigarette, lit another, telling himself it was ridiculous. And just before he touched flame to the tip of his smoke, he sniffed—and all but dropped his lighter. The fear raced all over his body like a disciplined army of insects. He knew why he was afraid now—the involuntary sniff had told the story.

In his nostrils was the same heavy, musk scent that still lingered about the hotel room where Ned Tolman lay dead—or had lain dead less than an hour before. Nor was that the first time he had smelled it. He recalled now, riding in an elevator with Dolores on his way to his first breakfast with Mayne Cornaman. He had smelled the same distinctive perfume then.

He looked at her, found her eyes hard on him. He said, "And are you the one who killed Arlene Crady too?"

She shook her head, replied, "No, hypnotism is not one of my talents. The boss will bear that out. Besides, I was here with him when that happened." She tapped the book in her lap, added, "Actually, I don't think this was worth all the bother."

"Hey!" he cried, astounded. "That's my thesis—the original version."

"*And* the boss' notes," she added imperturbably. She smiled a smile of inner amusement. "It will make one for my side when I tell him about it."

"Then you're the one who wrecked my apartment!" he exploded.

DOLORES regarded him with high mockery. She shrugged and said, "Well, it was decorated in execrable taste."

But Larry was on his feet, the anger of the past hour attaining a focus. "And

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it was you," he said savagely, "who killed Ned Tolman this morning so he couldn't talk to me about Ida!"

"I don't like killing," she replied. "Especially young men—not that way anyway—and especially young men I've been—fond of. But Ned was getting awfully tiresome."

Larry glared down at her and she met his glance with an infuriatingly inscrutable smile. He had an impulse to call the police—but what was there he could tell them? Dolores' mere presence in the hotel that morning would hardly constitute courtroom evidence. No, he was going to have to mete out justice for his friend's murder in purely personal fashion. Involuntarily he took a step toward her.

"I wouldn't," she said quietly. "I just told you I don't like killing young men—and even more than those I've been fond of do I dislike killing those I have yet to know. Remember what happened to Ned. Remember what happened to your bedroom safe—*and* the bed. Then take a good look around you."

He paused and obeyed. The room seemed filled with objects—heavy books, lamps, glass ashtrays, statuary busts, a number of metal boxes and cabinets—any one of which could become a lethal weapon under the guidance of the girl's telekinetic talents. Overwhelmed with frustration, he sank heavily back into his chair, sat there staring at her stupidly. "You win," he said. "For now."

"I win," she replied, "for always." She studied him as if he were something under glass, mused, "I'm beginning to wonder what you are all about, Larry. You don't *look* like enough hunk of he to be causing all the uproar you're causing."

He could only stare at her, unable to speak. She shrugged again said, "Well, some day soon I'm going to find out. Meanwhile, here comes the boss."

She rose as the front door opened and, moments later, Mayne Cornaman blotted out the doorway as he came in. He shut the door, said, "Hello, Larry, you look upset." Then he went to the bowl of flowers on his desk, swore and looked around. Moving with unexpected speed for a man so bulky, he darted to a picture high on the wall, plucked a concealed microphone from behind it, carefully messed it up.

Finished, he plopped down behind his desk, said, "This little game of hide-and-seek is getting to be a nuisance. All right, Larry, out with it—what's wrong?"

"My friend Ned Tolman was killed this morning—by telekinesis. I found the body," Larry told him bleakly.

Mayne Cornaman had picked up a metal paper cutter and was toying with it in his right hand. When Larry had finished, his plump fingers slowly constricted until, when he dropped it to the desk-top, it was a twisted, shapeless ribbon of alloy. He said, "Your friend—and mine too, Larry. Do you know why he was killed?"

"I believe he had something to tell me about Ida—Ida Stevens, who was my girl in Boston," said Larry. "What's more, it was your girl Dolores who killed him. She admitted it—was quite apologetic about it just now. Incidentally, it was she who robbed the apartment. There's the original thesis—and your notes." He nodded toward the small table, where Dolores had deposited them.

MAYNE CORNAMAN uttered a single obscene syllable. His cheeks, despite their plumpness, looked almost sunken as he lifted his eyes to meet Larry's. He said, "Ned was one of the ablest young men I've ever had working for me—one of the finest."

"He was my best friend," said Larry quietly.

"I know," the fat man rumbled. "He thought a whale of a lot of you, too, Larry. If it hadn't been for his recommendation I would never have accepted you as I have. If it hadn't been for Ned, Dan would never have been able to intercept you at Columbia last week. You'd be in jail, accused of murder, on

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your way to a madhouse."

"I'll do anything I can," said Larry quietly. "Anything."

"I believe you, young man," Mayne Cornaman told him. Then, with the forced trace of a smile. "But now, above all times, we've got to think, not feel. What lies in back of this sudden burst of violence after years of their working without it?"

"I don't know, sir," said Larry, "unless it's because they're ready to strike and are willing to do anything rather than risk any upsetting of their schedule." He frowned as he spoke, for it was hard for him to think with any detachment just then.

"Possibly," said the fat man, pursing his full lips. "Even probably. But I'll still stick to my guess that it's because of your being closer to the heart of the conspiracy than they like. What about this young lady of yours, this Ida Stevens? She's one of Adelaide Stevens' granddaughters, isn't she?"

"Yes—except she told me a little while ago she isn't sure about either of her parents," said Larry. He added idly, "She wanted me to go to Sulla Cay, off Florida, to visit her grandmother and try to get things straightened out somehow. I turned her down flat."

"You *what?*" roared Mayne Cornaman, springing up from behind his desk and slamming a thick fist down hard upon it. "You refused to go south with that girl after what we told you yesterday?"

Larry gulped, felt himself grow red. He said, "I couldn't help it. She just as good as admitted it was she who tipped *them* off to Ned's meeting with me this morning."

"And how do you think poor Ned would like it if he knew he had died in vain—just because a quarter-baked young idiot he thought was his friend didn't have either sense or guts enough to see it through?"

"I—I guess he wouldn't have liked it," said Larry wretchedly.

"You're lovin' well right he wouldn't!" roared Cornaman. "What's more—what's more. . . ." He ran down, slowly subsided, ran a hand through his thinning hair. "All right," he said wearily. "Perhaps this will help you understand. Adelaide Stevens, under an alias, was the young woman I told you about who had the nerve to come in here twenty-some years ago and tell me I'd better confine my scientific activities to parthenogenetic research from then on or else."

"Yes, sir," said Larry. Then, "Good God, I had no idea!"

"Of course you hadn't," the fat man told him wearily. "It was because of Ida's going to Boston that I sent Ned up there. Adelaide Stevens' granddaughters, all of 'em I know about at any rate, are all carriers of the Amazon strain. I pity any men-children they bear. The only trouble is Addy's sons, poor devils, produced quite a spawn before they died. She encouraged 'em."

"How rotten!" said Larry.

Mayne Cornaman shot him an oblique glance, said, "Son, there's always plenty of rottenness about anything truly cosmic—and this conspiracy is the most cosmic thing that's happened in this part of the universe since the planet between Mars and Jupiter blew up and became the asteroids. It's nature in action—like the black widow spider eating her mate after she's conceived. Only these widows are white—for the most part."

"I see," said Larry. Oddly enough he felt a sudden pang of sympathy for Ida, unsure of her paternity, reared in this strange, festering background. He said, "What about Dolores? Aren't you going to do something about her?"

"I shall kill her some day—if she doesn't kill me first," the fat man said unemotionally. He sounded utterly matter of fact about it. Then he added, "She's another of Addy's granddaughters by the way.

"But there's no resemblance between her and Ida," Larry protested, unwilling to accept such a relationship between the girls.

"You know Mendel's law," Cornaman said brusquely, "or at least Lysen-

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ko's. Why should there be a resemblance?" He paused, added, "You say your gal isn't sure of either of her parents?"

"That's what she told me," said Larry. "She isn't even sure that Mrs. Stevens is her grandmother."

There was a sudden speculative gleam in Mayne Cornaman's eyes. He said, "Larry—you don't have a picture of this gal about you, do you? I'd like to take a look at her."

LARRY reached for his wallet, said, "Just a snapshot—it isn't too good. Doesn't do her justice."

"Let me see it." The fat man held out his hand. Larry plucked out the snapshot he had taken of Ida on the North Shore picnic the summer before, handed it to him. It showed Ida from the hips up, clad in shorts and halter and squinting into the sun.

Mayne Cornaman looked at it, then held it under the light and peered at it, then grunted and dropped it to the desk. His head fell forward into his hands and his huge shoulders began to quiver. For a moment Larry thought he had burst into tears.

But when he lifted his immense pear-shaped head Larry saw that Mayne Cornaman was laughing—laughing so hard that his eyes bulged and his face was congested and he could not even attempt to speak. Yet there was no suggestion of hysteria in his manner. Finally, as he subsided, he managed to gasp, "No offense, my boy, but this is the richest twist of the cosmic jest yet. Oh my God! It's unbelievable!" Another gust of laughter. "Yet it's unmistakable!" A pudgy forefinger nudged at the inarticulate snapshot.

"If you'd give me some idea of what it's all about. . . ." said Larry with a trace of injured dignity.

"Can't, my boy," said the fat man, blowing like a whale that has stayed under water too long. "Can't possibly, even though I'm sure. Wouldn't be fair to her—or to you."

"What do you want me to do?" asked Larry unhappily, utterly baffled by his host's inexplicable burst of laughter.

For answer the fat man pushed the desk telephone toward him. Still wheezing he said, "Call her up—tell her you've reconsidered, got it? Tell her you want to go with her and visit grandma."

"All right," said Larry doubtfully. He picked up the phone dialled the number she had given him with her address the night before, waited while it rang. At length a strange and distant feminine voice answered and said, "Miss Ida left on the one o'clock plane."

When Larry gave this news to Mayne Cornaman, the fat man cast a quick look at the clock on his desk, said, "Quarter past two—you can still make it. Take Dan and go to your place and pack a bag and then get on out to Idlewild. It's about time Leon Brett used some of that infernal influence of his for some good. Get movin', man!" He picked up the phone, cradle and all, and made a threatening gesture at Larry. Larry got going.

While he packed Larry considered what to tell Toni. Surely he owed her something. When he had sufficient clothes assembled in one of the new rawhide bags that had come with his new life, he went out on the balcony and called to her. But she was apparently out, so he sat down while Dan Bright fumed and penned her a quick note, explaining that he had had to leave town unexpectedly and would get in touch with her as soon as he got back. Despite his commitments to Ida, he had no intention of losing the one normal girl in his life.

Traffic was heavy enroute to the airport but Dan Bright, cursing steadily in a monotone, managed to tool them through it skillfully. And once he reached the field all sense of slowness was gone. Apparently Leon Brett's influence was all it was cracked up to be.

Larry found himself in a chartered plane, piloted by a lanky loquacious Southwesterner, who grumbled incessantly because his swift little ship was not jet-propelled. "It's like flyin' a turtle,"

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he kept complaining while the speedometer hovered close to the four-hundred-mile-an-hour mark. "This ain't travelin' at all."

When they were over Virginia they got a message via radio. It informed the pilot that the one o'clock plane to Miami had been stacked up due to fog over Washington, was running 90 minutes late. They could catch it at Charleston if they wished—there was a seat for Lawrence Finlay, already reserved in his name.

"Well, whaddya say?" the irrepressible pilot asked him.

Larry, who had been considering the difficulties of explaining his presence in Miami ahead of Ida, said, "We take it."

Hence, about an hour later, he boarded the larger plane, saw the back of Ida's familiar brown head well forward with a vacant chair alongside. Nerving himself for the most important dramatic performance of what had, until recently, been in general an undramatic life, Larry sat down and fastened his safety belt.

Ida looked around casually and then her eyes widened and her lips parted. She opened them to say something but no words emerged. He smiled at her and laid a hand over hers and said, "I couldn't let you go alone, darling. Thank heaven for that fog over Washington or I'd never have caught up with you."

She said, "Thanks, Larry," and her eyes filled with tears.

XII

IDA never asked him a question—not on the rest of the way to Miami, not over dinner in a sumptuous coral-white Miami Beach hotel, not on the trim white and mahogany motor cruiser that arrived to carry them to Sulla Cay. At first this added to Larry's suspicion of her—it seemed abnormal in any woman not to inquire as to what had made him change his mind.

Then slowly he began to understand that she didn't dare. She was so grateful toward him for coming with her after all, so glad not to be alone once more, that she had no desire to say anything that would plunge them back, mentally and conversationally, in the mess up North. Not until they were half reclining, side by side, on flowered, waterproofed cushions in the cruiser cockpit, did he bring it up.

Then he said, "It was one of your cousins — Dolores Green — who killed Ned this morning."

"I know." She lifted her head a trifle to let the ocean wind blow her hair clear of her face. "I think it was to get away from Dolores and some of the others that I went to school in Boston."

"Ned followed you up there, you know," he told her.

She nodded. "We used to joke about it—I got to know Ned very well. I was fond of him—I think he liked me." The implications she gave the words were utterly different from those Dolores had given.

Looking at her—even knowing what she was—he thought that here was a truly fine girl, more than that the girl he probably should have married, might marry yet if she'd have him. He said, "Ida how deeply involved in this conspiracy are you?"

She was silent and he thought she had not heard his question. Then, before he could repeat it, she said, "As little as possible, considering my background. I know I've always hated it. Oh, I've done most of the things Grandmother asked me to do—but I think she knew better than to ask too much."

"Running errands and not letting yourself think what they might mean," he suggested. "Giving reports on suspect persons—like Ned and me. Is that it?"

She nodded, moved hesitantly closer to him. He extended his left arm and pulled her within its curve. He said, "You must hate your grandmother."

"If she *is* my grandmother," said Ida, her voice so low it could barely be heard above the steady drone of the motors. "No, darling, I don't hate her. Nobody hates her—not even you will

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hate her. She's—well, it's impossible. You'll understand when you meet her."

"All right—we'll pass on that," he replied. "But, Ida, how much do you know about this conspiracy—about its ultimate aims?"

Her eyes were bright and inquisitive on his as she said, "Not much—I know it's very old and that it may involve a mutant strain. I know its aim is to eliminate men. That always seemed silly."

"To you, perhaps," he replied. "But not to most of its members. Ida, if we can get clear of this mess, will you marry me? Now that I've finally got my thesis accepted and I'm in line for a Ph. D., I can probably get a half-decent job somewhere. Oh, it won't pay much of anything at first—probably it never will—but I'd at least feel I could hold up my head. What do you say, honey?"

She continued to study him, finally said, "You're a little surprised at yourself for proposing, aren't you, darling? You didn't really have any intention of doing so, did you?"

"Maybe not but I just did," he replied. "And that's another thing—you've got to stop reading my mind. Anybody else's—sure. But not what passes for mine. At least don't let me know you're doing it. Well, what about it?"

She laughed, very low and very gently, then put a soft hand against the cheek she had slapped that morning. She said, "I'm beginning to think you're a bigger fool than I am, Larry Finlay. You ought to know what my answer is."

HE GOT his other arm around her—but not before she had put both of hers around his neck and seemed to be seeking to merge her lips permanently with his. For one wild instant he wondered if this was what she had intended all along—then he decided the moment was not one that required analysis.

There were trim cabins below in the swift cruiser but Larry and Ida never visited them that night. In their happiness and sudden release after such appalling heights of tension, they fell asleep in one another's arms in the aft cockpit, washed clean by the salt spray the ocean occasionally flicked their way.

A grinning young steward wakened them at dawn. He said in West Indian accents, "I think perhaps you will both feel better for some coffee—perhaps?" He was swaying easily with the rhythm of the boat, holding a tray with two steaming cups from which he had not spilled a drop.

Ida blinked and yawned and ran sticky fingers through sticky brown hair and laughed a little in embarrassment and said, "Thank you, Dubarry—please put it down." Then, when he had laid it on the cockpit table and departed, "Mmm, Larry, what a wonderful morning!"

Larry managed to prop himself up on an elbow, sent his other hand to explore the small of his back, which felt vaguely as if an entire armored division had used it for a Bailey Bridge. He shook his head partly clear of cobwebs, said, "Yeah, I feel the way you look."

She made a crinkly face at him, said, "Here, have some coffee. Really, it *is* a wonderful morning."

"Maybe—for marlin or abalone," he told her. But when he had downed half a cup of the bitter-hot liquid he began to feel almost human. He looked at Ida and she was grinning at him over her cup and all at once he grinned back at her as a gull screamed overhead. It was easy just then to forget about Amazons and Mayne Cornaman and Dolores Green and Ned and Toni Loring and Lieutenant Harvey and Dan Bright and the little gray man. Around them the water was ridiculously blue, reflecting the orange-pink afterglow of dawn.

"Look ahead—off the port bow!" said Ida suddenly. "There's the Cay!"

And there it lay, emerald green foliage set in white gold sand that hugged the water closely, almost as if it were a part of the sea itself. Getting to his feet a trifle stiffly, Larry watched its proportions grow as they approached it, while Ida stood beside him, her arm

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linked in his, her brown hair blown free by the wind.

They entered a tiny bay embraced by low green headlands and Larry felt as if he was back in the Southwest Pacific. Here were trim twin jetties, jutting out from the nearly blinding white sand, backed by low white-coral buildings. On one side the dark green trees and undergrowth, save for a widely-spaced border of gentle palms, had been cut away to be replaced by tilled land. Behind the cluster of buildings that backed the twin jetties could be seen a white road, winding out of sight around a forest clump. And on the left was a palm-backed stretch of lawn, upon which a power mower was performing its function, manned by a straw-hatted black.

A competent looking young-old woman in much-laundered shorts and shirt was awaiting them at one of the jetties, her hair bleached white by the sun, her skin burned almost black. She led them to a jeep parked at the foot of the jetty, saw their bags were loaded before telling them to hop in. She said to Ida, "Addy was glad to hear you were coming. I think she's been worried about you. And this, I take it, is young Finlay?"

AS HE shook hands with her Larry knew instinctively that there was another Amazon. He could sense the assurance given her by paranormal powers, wondered what form hers took. They drove over a gentle rise, past a neat little village complete with church and store and populated, as far as Larry could tell, entirely by Negroes.

Then they turned from the road into a narrower lane, which wound through palm woods to a low large house that sat chaste and white in an immense brilliant burst of unbearably colorful tropical flowers. Ida, looking shyly at Larry murmured, "Isn't it beautiful, darling?"

"If you say it looks like a collection of crown jewels you're a lanovac, whatever that is," said their driver from around a cigarette, which dropped from her lower lip. Her name, Larry managed to remember, was Marty Graham.

He said, "Miss Graham, I guess I'm a lanovac then."

She said, "Call me Marty—everybody does. And I guess everyone thinks the same thing when they see it. I know I did. Well, here we are." She clambered out of the jeep and began superintending the unloading of the bags by a quartet of servants. Then, to Ida, "Addy says to put you in the bay-wing and give Larry the west suite."

"Where is Grandmother?" Ida asked.

"Oh—she's at the fronton," said Marty Graham. "She wants you both to come down there as soon as you've had something to eat."

"We can eat later," said Ida promptly. "Can't we, Larry?"

"Sure," said Larry. He was ravenous, but his desire to meet the fabulous Adelaide Stevens outpaced his hunger for the moment. So, after a brief wash-up he and Ida strolled between banks of bougainvillea and bird-of-paradise flowers and other varihued growths Larry could not name to a long white shed, almost concealed in a tiny ravine, from which erratic thumping sounds, interlaced with occasional cries, were sounding.

A cluster of white women, clad in bathing suits or shorts and halters, were seated along a sharp bank overlooking a three-sided jai alai court. Most of them smiled and nodded and one or two said, "Hello, Ida," but they were intently watching the action on the court. Larry looked around for another male among the spectators, had the sudden uncomfortable sensation of being trapped at a hen-party.

The only other visible male was on the court—a short, slim, incredibly agile little man wearing a dark mustache and beret and the long curved basket of a jai alai player. As Larry sat down he leapt high up the single side-wall to catch a swift return and sent it flying back some two hundred feet or so to the front wall.

"Pretty, Esteban!" some one called.

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But Esteban had little time to enjoy his spectacular shot. His opponent raced forward, caught the dying rebound on the tip of a cesta, lashed it hard against the wall so that it soared over Esteban's head and died behind him against the rear wall.

Incredibly, his opponent was a woman—a slender sun-bronzed woman with sun-streaked hair whose figure was the figure of a girl in her early twenties and whose face suggested a longer term of existence only by lines of experience rather than of age. She said, "Well, that does it, Esteban. And I didn't cheat once."

"Grandmother's telekinetic," said Ida simply. "Sometimes she makes the pelota do tricks. It makes Esteban furious."

"That's grandma?" said Larry incredulously.

"That's Grandmother," said Ida with a note of pride. And, Larry thought, she had a right to be proud. A grandmother like Addy Stevens was something! Come to think of it, he wondered, how could you hate a woman like that? He began to understand better certain facts of Mayne Cornaman's behavior that had hitherto baffled him.

THEY breakfasted with Adelaide Stevens in a low-roofed, sunwashed, half-open-air dining room at the house. When the meal was over the incredible grandmother lit a cigarette and studied first Ida, then Larry. She was still, Larry thought, a strikingly beautiful woman—not pretty, but with strength of character and an alert intelligence that combined with good features to surpass mere prettiness.

She said, "I don't have to ask you why you're here, kids. All I'm going to say is that I approve of your marriage. Larry, you've caused me considerable trouble—quite inadvertently—as you must know. As for Ida, I think she knows how I feel about her. Now, Ida, if you'll excuse us, I'd like to have a brief chat with Larry—alone."

Ida looked at her grandmother and said quietly, "Unless Larry wants me to leave I'd rather hear it with him."

Larry reached for her hand on top of the table, squeezed it. Mrs. Stevens looked at them both, then shrugged her bare bronzed shoulders slightly and warned, "I suppose it's time you knew the truth about yourself, Ida—certainly Larry has a right to know."

"Not as much as she has," said Larry.

"You may be right—it's difficult for me to decide," Mrs. Stevens told them, tipping a long ash off the end of her cigarette into a hammered silver tray. Then, to Larry, "I presume my old friend and enemy, Mayne Cornaman, has given you a somewhat perverted idea of our purpose."

"He's given me an idea," said Larry equivocally.

"We're trying to salvage the world before it destroys itself," Mrs. Stevens said quietly. "We—women like my granddaughters and myself—have been working toward this end for centuries. Now, thanks largely to Ida, we are at last ready to act."

"Thanks to me?" the girl looked bewildered. "But how?"

"For some reason our particular strain demands an intermediate male generation to breed itself," said Mrs. Stevens quietly. "It is this alternate generation business that has kept us chained for thousands of years. I'm not underrating what men have done for the world—but it is nothing compared to what they've done to it."

"Plundered planet stuff," said Larry.

"Exactly," the older woman told him. "But you know something of our history. The point is that until we could prove through parthenogenesis that our paranormal qualities—our psi qualities if you wish—could be transmitted directly from one generation to the next without any assistance from an intermediate male we could not really risk our move.

"Ida is that child—produced by your friend Mayne Cornaman himself, parthenogenetically, under our supervision. What he does not yet know is that his pathetic defense through overeating has

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proved unavailing. Our scientists have finally matched his process.

"Naturally I would prefer Ida not to marry—or at least to have children by a man," Adelaide Stevens' voice was as calm as if she were discussing a movie plot. "However, I am extremely fond of her and I have no desire to condemn her to misery. Furthermore, the natural offspring of your marriage might prove interesting."

Larry looked at her, appalled. And then he thought of the Gargantuan laughter of Mayne Cornaman when he had shown the fat man Ida's picture the afternoon before. Of course the scientist had recognized her—perhaps from some trick of bone structure or similarity in feature to her mother.

He recalled what Mayne Cornaman had told him about his deception when the Amazons had trapped him in a mountain cabin with the human cattle they had selected for parthenogenetic testing. He looked at Ida with something like awe, realized that the resemblance had not been between her mother and herself but between herself and Cornaman. It was there in the strength of bone and feature, in the way their hair fell away from their foreheads above the ears. If Cornaman were not so obese, if he had not formerly hidden his lower face behind a beard, the similarities would have been obvious.

No wonder the fat man had laughed. His deception had grown into a monstrous jape on the Amazons. Yet it had done irreparable damage to Ida. He looked at her, tried to recapture the hand she withdrew swiftly from his own—but without avail.

She said, "Grandmother, I want Larry to go back to the mainland. I don't ever want to see him again. And, Grandmother, I think you're the most inhuman person I've ever met."

Mrs. Stevens' regard was tolerant, almost kindly, she said, "I think I can understand something of how you must feel, Ida. Remember, I warned you it would be a shock. But I'm not inhuman—far from it. It might be better if I were; the trouble with the world at present is a little too much humanity all around."

She turned to Larry, made a gesture of apology, told him, "I'm sorry, Larry, but I couldn't possibly let you go now. You see, we are just about to launch our first major attack—from here. We could not risk your warning your friend and patron, Mayne Cornaman. No, Larry, in spite of Ida's rudeness, I fear you're going to be with us quite a time. Perhaps Esteban can teach you jai alai if you're bored."

With a gasping sob, Ida stumbled to her feet, sending her chair clattering to the tile floor. Larry rose to help her, but she pushed him away crying, "I don't ever want to see you again!" and ran from the room.

Mrs. Stevens sighed and smiled sympathetically, said, "Poor girl—she'll get over it with time. I'm afraid you're going to have to be patient with her. Would you like another cup of coffee?"

Unwittingly, he realized, he had followed Ida right into the trap.

XIII

IT WAS midnight when Larry slipped out of his bedroom window, dropped to the soft surface of a flowerbed beneath, prepared to make his way to the harbor. He didn't have much hope of getting to a boat at one of the jetties and making his getaway. Yet he had to try.

He had seen too much that afternoon—laboratories where quiet, competent women worked with practiced efficiency at preparing the hideous cultures of bacteriological warfare—blueprints for organization of a world so depopulated that a few thousand well organized and self-sufficient Amazons could easily manage it to suit themselves—an underground radio station which, through a code of apparent static, could keep in touch with agents the world over.

He made his way slowly toward the bayside settlement, hugging the shelter offered by tree-growths alongside the road. Palm-fronds, silhouetted against

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the moonlit sky above him laced the ground with shadow-patterns of bizarre beauty—but he was in no mood to appreciate them. The further he got the more his unease grew.

He felt like the proverbial mouse in the clutches of a cat. He knew they were giving him a short run toward freedom before extending a paw and pulling him back to captivity. With their assembly of paranormal powers they must know what he was doing. Yet the effort had to be made.

When he got close to the bayside settlement he circled to his left, hoping to bypass it to the waterfront and swim silently around to a power-boat moored to one of the jetties. It appeared to be his only chance—if, as seemed unlikely, he had any at all.

He stood motionless in the shadow of a tall palm tree as a car passed along the road behind him and he shivered as he recalled the general outline of the plans he had seen that afternoon. Already, as Mayne Cornaman and Leon Brett suspected, the campaign in Asia had begun. Inevitably, unless it were checked at once, there would be war between the East and the West. And then the germs would be spread throughout Africa, the Americas, the island continents of the Pacific. Russia, the White Widows believed, would take care of Europe with its own retaliatory measures.

He wished desperately he could have seen Ida—but the shock the girl was suffering as a result of Mrs. Stevens' revelation of her supposed heredity was apparently still overwhelming. If only, he thought, he could have got to her and told her the truth—or would she have believed his story of her true paternity? He doubted it. She would certainly think it just an effort on his part to cheer her up.

He reached the beach without molestation, stripped down to his shorts and plunged into the water, which surrounded him like a warm bath. Swimming easily to conserve his breath, he headed out for a hundred yards or so, then cut right toward the jetties, whose whiteness reflected the moonlight in an ominous, deadish gray.

Twenty yards from the piers he trod water, selected a swift-looking motor-boat moored furthest from the shore. If only he could get into it and get it going and clear the twin headlands that now looked to him like the claws of a gigantic lobster about to close. . . .

He took a deep breath, swam the rest of the way under water, felt an outstretched hand touch the curved bottom of the boat he sought. He surfaced alongside, regained his breath, shook the water out of his eyes—and looked up into the lighted tip of a cigarette.

Marty Graham, seated in the boat he had chosen, said, "Enjoying your swim, Larry? The water's nice here all year round. Better let me give you a hand overside."

He had a curious detached feeling—as if he were outside himself, looking on, a mere playgoer in an orchestra seat. He said, "I don't know—maybe I'd rather drown," and she merely laughed.

She said, "Better come on out of the bay. You may be able to think of some other way to get away from here later."

Cat and mouse with a vengeance. Perhaps, he thought, if he let her pull him out, she'd be vulnerable. Perhaps he could. . . .

"Don't try anything rash," she said with quiet good humor. "I could kill you right now without moving a muscle. But men are going to be scarce pretty soon. . . ."

He felt sick with humiliation, lifted a hand for her to help him into the boat. She leaned forward and as she did so another female silhouette rose behind her, a slim arm was wielded briefly, there was the sound of something hard and heavy hitting Marty's head. She fell from view, to be replaced by her assailant.

"Quick, Larry!" It was Ida speaking in a strained whisper. "Get in here."

He scrambled over the side, grabbed the girl, tried to kiss her—but her lips avoided his. She whispered, "Hurry, darling. I knew when you left the house.

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I knew Marty would be here. You haven't much time. Use the oars until you're well out, then start the motor."

"What do you mean, *me?*" he countered. "You're coming along."

She shook her head, said, "No, Larry. You've got to do it alone. I belong here. After all, I'm one of Grandmother's experiments, aren't I? I'm not even human—not really."

"But you *are!*" he insisted, reaching for her. "Mayne Cornaman cheated. You're no more parthenogenetic than I am. He told me."

"I don't believe you, darling," she whispered softly, giving him a quick hug, "but thanks anyway for trying. Now go—I think you'll find some sort of patrol boat waiting about five miles out. Anyway, there are men in a boat, and they're armed. Go to them—due west."

He uttered a muffled, *"Hey!"* as she began with unsuspected strength to drag Marty Graham from the boat onto the jetty. He gave her a hand with the unconscious Amazon, reached for her again—but she read his purpose and eluded him, gave the boat a quick shove from the pier. She stood there proudly and said, "Good-bye, Larry."

He whispered as loudly as he dared, "Ida, you can't—" but already the margin of water between them was widening. He thought of the Amazon plans, of his slender chances of escape. He looked back at Ida. She had seated herself beside her victim and lit a cigarette. She waved to him silently. With a curse that was half a sob he reached for the oars in the bottom of the boat. . . .

HE BREAKFASTED the following morning with Leon Brett and Mayne Cornaman, who had flown down from New York upon receipt of his message, radioed from the Navy patrol boat that picked him up. The fat man grumbled at the meagerness of Navy Rocket base fare but approved his daughter's behavior. Stirring thick coffee with distaste he said, "You lost a good girl in that one—and so did I, Larry."

"What do you mean—'lost'?" Larry asked, a sudden shaft of panic slicing his diaphragm.

The fat man's eyes slid away from his own. He said through a mouthful of sausage and griddle cakes, "You don't think we're going to let that island survive the day, do you?"

Larry dropped his fork. He said, "But that's murder! How can you get away with it?"

"It's not murder—it's war, Larry," said Leon Brett quietly. "And they're murdering already in Asia. You have no idea of the international situation just now." He glanced at his watch, got up, said, "We've got just about time to see them launch the rocket."

"What—what are you going to do?" he asked, feeling sick.

"Come along and find out, young man," said Mayne Cornaman, wiping his lips and laying his napkin on the table.

"But your own daughter," said Larry.

Mayne Cornaman looked at him obliquely. "I know," he said. "I guess maybe my little trick on the Amazons wasn't so funny after all, was it?"

Larry said nothing. They were driven in a Navy command car to an intensively guarded and isolated stretch of level sand, trebly fenced with electrified barbed wire and backed with flak and searchlight towers, pillboxes and patrolled by Marine sentries in pairs.

He felt numb as they were taken into a concrete bunker, with a quartz-glass vision slit, through which he could see the deadly rocket encased in the steel lattice-work of its launching tower. It looked a little, he thought, like a single Gothic spire, being raised to some unknown god in the desert, in the process of construction. So numbed was he that he paid little attention to the organized confusion around him.

He thought of Ida and all the other White Widows, as he was beginning to label them, of Marty Graham and the dynamic Adelaide Stevens, of Esteban the Basque jai alai player, of the natives

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on the island. It turned his stomach to think of what was going to happen to them when that beautiful Gothic missile landed.

Then he thought of Arlene Crady and Ned Tolman and Dolores and of the things he had seen in the island laboratories—and he knew there was no other way. Grimly he watched while the final seconds were counted away and then, with a hissing roar, the slender rocket rose from its tower, ever more swiftly, to vanish in the hot blue sky, leaving a twisting trail of smoke behind it.

On a huge television screen, moments later, he saw the rocket, no longer rising but flying parallel to the earth, shooting across the sky toward its destination. Then he saw the island, gray and black and white rather than green and gold on the screen, saw the flash of the dreadful downward glide of the guided missile, blinked as the atomic blast made the screen a rectangle of light, watched the hideous mushroom-shaped cloud assemble and rise higher, higher. . . .

"Well," said a khaki-clad naval officer with the single star of a rear admiral on the collar of his shirt, "at least we know that damned war-head works."

"Yeah," said another. "With no hills to block radiation they'll be picking up pieces for two miles around."

This time Larry could no longer hold it. He barely made the lavatory in time.

They waited until the first damage reports came in. Destruction, save for a few isolated palm trees, had been total on Sulla Cay. Not a living thing on the island had survived the blast. There was quiet jubilation around them at having stolen a jump on both Army and Air Force in achieving the first actual guided-missile blast against a real enemy—successfully.

"All this against a few poor women," said Larry bitterly.

MAYNE CORNAMAN shook his head and laid a fat hand on his shoulder and said, "You mustn't think of it like that. These were no poor women, Larry. They represented one of the worst menaces the world has ever known. What's more, they've only lost one battle."

"How do you mean that, Mayne?" Leon Brett asked quickly.

"Oh, they've been crushed before, plenty of times—worse than this," the fat man told him. "They've lost their leader and their headquarters. Their bacteriological campaign will be checked. But the strain is still with us—the strain and the ambition and the desire to put the rest of humanity in step with it or else. They'll be back."

"But with a carefully nursed publicity campaign . . ." said Brett.

"It may keep them quiet for a while," Cornaman told him. "We'll give Larry's thesis a play, of course. But by lying doggo, with time they'll make our campaign look silly. And they'll hide their paranormal talents as they always have. Then, when we're all dead and people have forgotten the urgency, they'll get going again."

"Cheerful prospect," said Leon Brett.

"It's life, man," Cornaman told him. "How soon can we get back to New York so I can get a decent meal?" He looked at Larry, read his expression correctly, told him, "I know, I started making a glutton of myself to save my neck—but now this belly of mine's used to it—the best food in the greatest possible quantities."

Larry said nothing—not then or when they rode north in a plane even faster than the one that had enabled him to catch the airliner the day before. He kept thinking that Ned was gone, Ida was gone, his old way of life was gone. He felt emptied, beyond emotion, like a man exposed to an explosion so vast his ears are aware of no sound at all.

He went back to the apartment and found it had been repaired, that everything was in order. He got out of the khakis the Navy had given him, took a shower and couldn't feel it. He poured himself a stiff drink of Scotch and downed it with none of his usual tremors, felt no lift. He got into slacks and a shirt and wandered out on the balcony.

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Toni was there, reclining in her deck-chair, taking the afternoon sun with a book in her lap and a cool drink by her side. Looking at her he felt a sudden intense relief that was almost pain. Here was beauty, here was generous affection, here was the normal as against the strange channels through which his life had recently been diverted.

Slowly she turned her head and saw him and her lips curved in a smile of sheer delight, "Larry darling!" she said. "I'd given up expecting you at all. You're the most unpredictable male!"

"More unpredicted against than unpredicting," he told her and actually found himself smiling. He didn't bother to go inside and use the apartment doors to reach her. Instead he scaled the low barrier that divided the balcony between them.

For a while they sat and talked, as reunited lovers will, and Larry suppressed all thoughts of his recent experience. He had just taken Toni in his arms when the phone rang. He reached for it but a strong female arm blocked his movement and Toni whispered, "Oh no! Not again, darling. Let it ring."

It did—and finally he pulled himself clear of her and picked it up. Mayne Cornaman's voice sounded hoarse and strained. He said, "You'd better get on over here right away, Larry. There isn't much time. I just killed Dolores Green."

XIV

MAYNE CORNAMAN himself let Larry in. His coloring was unusually pasty and unhealthy and he wore the purple-and-gold dressing gown Larry had worn when he first met the fat man. A towel, stained brightly and ominously with crimson, was wrapped around his left wrist. He said, "Don't mind the mess here for a little—follow me."

But Larry couldn't help looking as he walked across the big hall after his host. The place was a shambles. Dan Bright was dead. He lay crushed like some sickening giant insect beneath a huge highboy that appeared to have sprung from its usual perch on the wall to land squarely on top of him.

Noting Larry's gaze Mayne Cornaman said, "Poor Dan tried to stop her but he didn't have a chance. At least I got even for him."

Larry looked upward after the fat man and was almost sick for a second time that day. Dolores Green dangled from the upper banister, swinging slowly at the end of a curtain cord, one end of which had disappeared beneath the flesh of her neck. Her face was black, her eyes staring, her tongue protruding.

Larry said, "Good God!"

"I know," said the fat man. "But it was the only way. When she went for me Dan tried to stop her and got killed. I had to do something. Not very pretty, is it?"

"Not very," said Larry, feeling as numb as he had while observing the blast of the atomic rocket missile on Sulla Cay. "What about the police?"

Mayne Cornaman shook his head. "Let cook call them when he gets in tomorrow morning. I don't want *you* mixed up in this. You're goin' to be too damned important. But come on—there's not much time left and I've a hell of a lot to tell you."

He staggered a little and Larry saw that blood was dripping from the towel about his wrist. He cried, "You're hurt, sir!"

Mayne Cornaman avoided his supporting arms, said with an odd twitch of his thick lips, "In the words of Browning's Frenchman at Ratisbon, 'Nay, I am dead, sire!' Come *on!*"

He led the way to a first-floor bathroom off his study, of whose existence Larry had not previously been aware, stripped off the robe, flung the bloody towel to the floor and half-slid, half crumpled into the tub. Against the white tile his immense bloated body glowed a faint pink except for the steady flow of crimson from his arm. It had been sliced cleanly, as if by a razor."

"Got me with a carving knife," he told Larry absently. "The damned thing came flying at me from nowhere. She

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always was a vicious creature—needed Addy to keep her in line."

"Here—let me apply a tourniquet," said Larry, remembering his wartime training and making a move toward the door.

"Sit down," said the fat man peremptorily. "It's no use. You seem to have missed the cream of the jest, Larry. You see, I'm a bleeder too and this cut can't be staunched. I know—never dared shave till the electric razor came along. Used to wear a beard. Had to."

"I remember," said Larry as the implications of what Cornaman had just told him sank in. No wonder his host had waged relentless war on the White Widows—he was one of their biological victims. And no wonder poor Ida had possessed paranormal powers. In its grisly way it *was* a jest—a jest of cosmic proportions.

CORNAMAN said, "I make a punk Petronius, don't I? But never mind that now. Young man, I'm passing on the torch to you. You're the only one around now who knows the score and has sufficient knowledge and brains and experience to fight these damned women.

"Don't worry—they'll find you. They know about you already. They'll try to use you or destroy you if they can't. They'll keep you under observation, never fear. And you'll have to plan your own campaigns against them."

"But how?" asked Larry desperately, noting that already Mayne Cornaman's flesh was losing color. "What can I do?"

"Plenty," said Cornaman grimly. "With Whittaker's backing you'll be able to pile up a reputation where it counts. And I've already made arrangements to turn over my patents to you. You're going to be rich as sin, Larry. All I ask is you use it wisely."

"I—I don't know," said Larry, his mouth suddenly dry. "All I can promise is I'll try." He shivered a little at the prospect of the responsibility being thrust on his relatively untrained shoulders.

"That's all any of us can do," the fat man told him, closing his eyes through sheer weakness. "Remember, *they're* only trying too. They make mistakes or we'd never have stopped 'em this time." He opened his eyes and fixed Larry with them.

"If I were you, boy I'd lie low for awhile, get myself established somewhere, get my bearings. Whittaker will help you with that and there's always Leon if you need him. You'll do okay. After that—well, you'll be on your own, son."

He roused himself by a superhuman effort, looked down with a flickering half-smile at the life-blood draining from his immense bulk, said, "Our friend Harvey's going to have one sweet time tryin' to figure this one out." Then, "But there's still a lot of details, Larry. I want to tell you what I can while I can. First, as regards my papers. You'll find the law firm of. . . ."

He talked on for half an hour, giving Larry places and names, which the younger man took down on paper. As the story unfolded Larry grew increasingly appalled by the amount of worldly wealth he was due to inherit from the fat man.

Then there were more details about the White Widows, such remnants of them as the fat man knew to be left. Finally he said, "That's about all, Larry." His voice was very low, very weak. "But we only got the main stem of them. And the branches we missed are bound to take root."

He peered at Larry as if his vision were getting dim, said, "Now, son—it isn't going to be pretty and I want to do it alone." He closed his eyes and lay there, a putty-gray mass of flesh that rose and fell only occasionally with his difficult breathing.

Larry left but waited just outside the door until the breathing had stopped. Then, averting his eyes from the grisly mess in the hall he left and walked back to his apartment through the echoing dark city streets. More than ever before loneliness walked at his elbow.

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When he got back Toni was sleeping on her side, hair spread on the pillow like a soft fan. He watched her quiet breathing for a long time.

They were married two weeks later when the uproar over Mayne Cornaman's strange death had somewhat subsided. On their honeymoon they flew to South America, then to Africa, then to Europe. When at last they returned, sunburned and healthy, Dean Whittaker had arranged an assistant professorship in organic biology for Larry at a small but renowned university.

Toni fitted in perfectly, employing makeup discreetly and making a point of letting older faculty wives talk her ear off. She proved to be, as she had told him that afternoon in his apartment, a domestic animal.

Sometimes the whole White Widow business seemed to Larry like a dream. Walking home across the freshly-green campus one evening the following spring he wondered briefly if any of it had really happened. But there was his fine old house, newly reconditioned, the two fine cars in his garage, the servants, the clothes he was wearing—all of them far beyond his salary as an assistant professor.

As he approached his house, set well back behind tall hedge and a stretch of impeccable lawn, he thought for a moment he saw a little colorless man duck out of sight around a corner—a little man who wore thick-lensed glasses and one shoulder higher than the other. It brought him up with a start.

Then he grinned and shook his head and told himself he was acting like a jittery child. He supposed he never would be able to shake some of the experiences he had undergone in that one incredible stretch of less than two weeks. And he would never be able to spend the money that had resulted from it.

He went on in and nodded to the pleasant-faced, trimly-uniformed maid who appeared in the dining room doorway and informed him Mrs. Finlay was upstairs. He went on up and stood in the doorway, watching Toni as she lay stretched out on a chaise longue, thinking her just about the most beautiful thing he had ever seen.

As he looked on she frowned to herself, looked about her and at the table beside her. Then, glancing across at a vanity table against the wall her forehead cleared and her dark eyes narrowed briefly. A campact resting on the vanity table rose and flew easily the ten feet to her waiting palm. Opening it, she began to study her face, to ready herself for his arrival.

He had a sudden vivid recollection of sitting across a table from Toni, with Ida and Ned Tolman, in Hilary Duggan's, of Toni reaching for her lighter and having it spring upward into her fingers. At the time he had taken it for granted that Ida was responsible for the telekinesis. Now, of course, he knew better.

They had him—they had him good. He wondered what to do, what Mayne Cornaman would have done, recalled that the fat man had kept Dolores close even though he knew what she was. He was going to have to do the same with Toni, just go along as if nothing had happened. But he would never again feel safe as long as he lived.

And he wondered about the child Toni was carrying. He hoped it would be a boy. . . .

Coming in the Next Issue

HIS HEAD IN THE CLOUDS

A Brilliant Satirical Novelet by KENDELL FOSTER CROSSEN

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Warner Bros.

The sea captain doesn't believe his eyes

And Now—the Beast

WITH the recrudescence (you should excuse the expression) last year of the moneymaking thriller "King Kong," Hollywood has been turning cartwheels trying to go itself one better. To do this, *Warner Brothers* have added THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS to provide you with your dish—seafood à la king kong.

It happens this away.

An experimental atomic blast in the Arctic cracks an ancient glacier, and out of this deep freeze debuts rhodosaurus after a million-year beauty sleep.

After a brush with death, scientist Tom Nesbitt, played by Paul Christian, reports having observed the monster. The psychiatrists coolly inform him that he's been seeing things, or polysyllabic words to the same effect. Nesbitt, of course, demurs.

In the meantime, rhedosaurus, happy to be defrosted, is galloping (or slithering) southward for more imical climes, wreaking havoc the while.

Nesbitt enlists the aid of paleontologist Thurgood Elson, played by the cherubic Cecil Kellaway. Elson's not as ready to believe Nesbitt's story as his pretty assistant, Lee Hunter. But of course that's a story almost as old as rhedosaurus.

Lee invites Nesbitt up to her apartment to see her etchings—of prehistoric reptiles—and he's convinced that the monster he saw was no relation to a pink brontosaurus.

Seeing is believing, and when the monster turns up in Manhattan, the doubting Thomases do a swift double-take. A barri-

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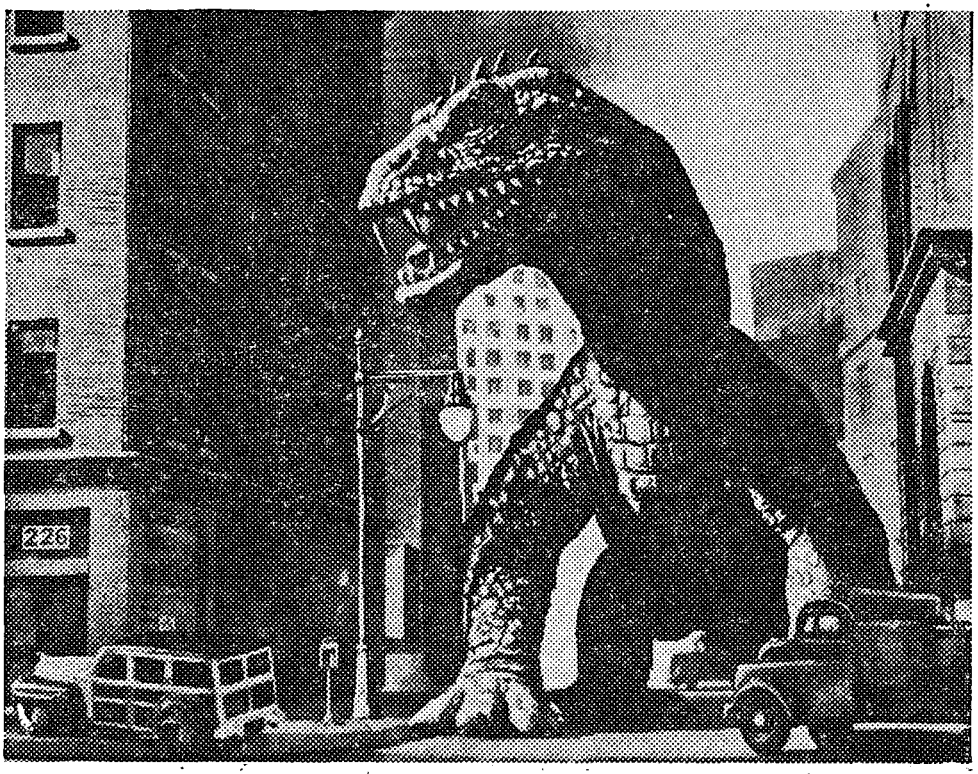

Rhedosaurous finds Manhattan just his plaything . . .

from 20,000 Fathoms!

cade is thrown across Wall Street and the panic is worse than in '29. A bazooka barrage fails to stop the frolicsome, destructive beast, but sends it back to its aquatic asylum.

Since the beast is spreading a deadly virus, the emergency mounts and tension builds. We won't spoil the last moments of the film, set in the amusement park at Coney Island, except to comment that so far as we're concerned a roller coaster is enough to scare anyone to death.

Interesting, we think, to note that this epic was based on a short story by Ray Bradbury. You may recall "The Fog Horn" in the recent Doubleday anthology, "The Golden Apples of the Sun." As a science fiction story this had much appeal. Expanded to movie script length, it's impossible to retain any of the poetic poignancy of the original, but it does provide top entertainment. Reminds us, however, of the old Danny Kaye routine: Screenplay by Joe Blotz based on a story by Don Splatz and a suggestion of Susie Potts from an idea of Moe Glotz taken from a joke by Flo Plotz. You get the idea.

This was a well-paced, expertly directed picture with a better than average script and excellent performances by Paul Christian and Cecil Kellaway—not to mention the beast in its swan song. Director Eugene Lourie did a fine job, and producers Hal Chester and Jack Dietz deserve to have your assets unfrozen for a trip to see this one.

—Pat Jones

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The Vennies didn't make any sound—or do anything

The Unforgiven

By EDMOND HAMILTON

They hailed him as a hero for the one deed which he hoped to forget. . . .

HE WAS a big guy; he was famous and he'll always be famous, but I still say he was a little crazy. At least, that's what I think most of the time. Other times—well, I don't know what to think.

I remember that when he arrived from

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Earth, I wasn't much interested when the bunch in the barracks told me about it. I'd just got back to base from a hard day, and I was tired.

"He only landed at Port yesterday," Spafford told me. "Came right up here today. It's him, all right. Farrell Blaine, himself."

So it was Farrel Blaine—so what? I knew the name, all right, everybody knew it, but I was getting ash-dust out of my shoes and I didn't care about VIP's from Earth.

"What's he look like, Louie?" asked one of the others.

"Not so old as you'd think," said Spafford. "And you know what—he's got a suntan. Yeah, a real Earth tan. The lucky son! Probably got it lazying around beaches with a lot of blondes."

"You've got blondes on the brain," I said.

Spafford jeered. "Listen to Wimer! He don't like 'em. He wouldn't like it if he found one in his bunk right now, a nice little blonde with—"

He went on to describe the blonde in detail.

"Sure I'd like it," I said. "I'd like it fine. I just don't like hearing you yak about it all the time."

That made him mad. "So me talking about dames gets you down? Okay, okay, we'll talk about something else. You see any more Vennies today?"

And there it was again, all of them grinning at me, and I wondered if they were ever going to quit ribbing me about that, and I wished to God for the hundredth time I'd never opened my mouth about Vennies.

Spafford kept turning the knife. "You ought to go and talk to Farrel Blaine about it, Wimer. You and he got a lot in common, you know. You both discovered something."

That got a laugh. I let it go by, and went on cleaning my shoes. There wasn't any use arguing it all over again.

Then an orderly from HQ popped his head in and said, "Colonel wants you, Wimer," and ducked out again.

Somebody said, "Jeez, what you do?"

"The colonel wants him to meet Farrel Blaine, probably," said Spafford. "Sure, just like I said, they're both famous guys—"

I brushed down fast and got started, glad to get out of the barracks right then, but puzzled and worried too.

The night was hot and black and acrid with smog. We were burning off the Glades northwest, and that made it hard to breathe. I coughed and spat and wished for a wind, a hard wind like you have on Earth but that wouldn't ever blow here.

I went between the barracks to HQ, and the orderly passed me in, and there were the colonel and the major and the VIP sitting around a table with drinks on it.

The colonel said, "That's all right, Wimer, this is unofficial. Have a chair—but first, meet Mr. Farrel Blaine."

I shook hands. I saw now what Spafford meant. Blaine didn't look so old. Not that he was any kid, he must have been nearly fifty. I'd heard his name nearly all my life, I was just six when he did his big stunt. But that was over twenty years ago, and you figured he'd be a pretty ancient guy.

But he wasn't. His hair was still black, and he was still lean. His suntan stood out, here on Venus. He'd have looked even younger, if he hadn't seemed so tired. Even his eyes seemed tired.

I thought, So you're the big hero—you took just one chance twenty years ago and you've been famous ever since. Pretty soft!

But what I said was, "I'm sure proud to meet you, Mr. Blaine."

Blaine asked me, "Like it in the Corps?"

I knew better than to sound off with an honest answer. I put on my bright boy scout look and said, "It's tough sometimes, but it's a real job."

The colonel said, "Wimer is the man who saw the Vennies."

I felt kind of sick, then. So that was what it was all about. I'd been fetched in to tell my funny story to the VIP. I saw the major grinning as he boosted up

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his drink.

Blaine looked at me and asked, "*Did* you see Vennies?"

I SQUIRMED a little and tried to hedge. "Well, I thought I did. You know, it's pretty tangled up there in the Glades, and you can't be sure sometimes just what you see."

Blaine didn't say anything for a moment, and then he asked, "How many?"

Both the colonel and the major were grinning now. I damned them inside for making a show out of me. I said, "Maybe two, I thought. I only saw their legs. Could have been lizard's legs, I guess—"

"Of course that's what it was," said the major. "There aren't any Vennies. Haven't been any, for a dozen years."

The colonel said, "When I first came to Venus, there were still hundreds of them. Especially in the southern Glades."

Blaine looked as though he were thinking. He said, "When I first came, there were tens of thousands."

"Well, they're all gone now," said the major, and grinned at me and added, "Except for the ones that Wimer saw."

Why the hell didn't they let it drop? It wasn't that funny. I'd been kidded enough already about seeing Vennies, and this would start it all up again stronger than ever. I could just hear Spafford going to town on this.

I suddenly woke up to the fact that Blaine was saying, "I'd like to go up there with Wimer and see. Would it be all right, Colonel?"

He took the colonel by surprise, as well as me. The colonel said, "Oh, why, of course—but really, Mr. Blaine, you know it's a wild-goose chase and it'd be a dull trip—over a hundred miles up in the Glades—"

"That's all right," Blaine said. "You know I came to look around at the new Venus. I'd be interested in seeing if any of the old Venus is left."

The colonel didn't like it. "But you can't use a copter, for the ceiling slams down tight every few days. And—"

Blaine said, "Wimer and I could make it in a trac-car. Couldn't we?"

That last, he asked me. I said, "Yes, we could."

"Then we'll start in the morning—if the colonel is agreeable."

The colonel bloody well had to be agreeable, and knew it. "All right. But I'll hold you responsible, Wimer. You can go now."

So that was that, and here I was walking back down to the barracks with the biggest VIP there was dumped into my lap. That was just fine. My big mouth had really got me into it, this time. Why the devil had I ever come yelling back to camp about seeing Vennies, that day? It'd been nothing but a headache ever since.

I didn't want to yak to the others about it, so I waited till well after lights-out before I went back in. I lay in my bunk and wondered about Farrel Blaine. I couldn't figure his angle. It couldn't be that he was just curious. He'd seen Vennies, more than anybody ever had. I didn't get it.

NEXT morning I reported at HQ and there was a trac-car waiting, and the colonel's orderly was piling Farrel Blaine's stuff into it. So this guy was a great explorer? He had a duffle-bag big enough for a year. It didn't make sense, for just a few days' trip. But it wasn't up to me to say anything. I just looked bright and respectful when Blaine came out with the colonel.

Blaine didn't say anything as I drove out of Base, and on up over the burned-over areas. He didn't seem to be much interested in the scenery. There wasn't much to see, except the black plains and the smoggy, leaden sky. It wasn't until afternoon that we wallowed over a swamp-lead, and got into the unburned Glades.

They were called the Glades because they looked a lot like the Everglades on Earth—the tall, sad-colored grass that went on forever, with only here and there a big hummock of trees like an island sticking up out of it. Then I suddenly remembered that it was the guy beside me, the first man ever to land on Venus,

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that had given them that name.

"I guess this looks more like it did twenty years ago," I said to him.

Blaine nodded. "Yes. There were no burned-over areas then."

"More than two-thirds of Venus is burned off now," I said, "and most of it already under cultivation. Big business, now."

Blaine didn't say anything to that. The smog seemed to bother him, and he coughed every so often.

I couldn't make him out. What'd he want to come up here for? Why would a guy who had it as good as he had on Earth want to come back here?

I tried to remember about him. It was a long time ago, and I'd been just a kid, and those screaming headlines were dim in my memory now.

"It was down south you landed, wasn't it?" I asked.

He nodded, but he didn't say anything. I thought, All right, if you don't want to be friendly, the hell with you.

So Blaine was a Hero, with a capital H. He'd brought the first rocket down safe through the clouds, all those years ago. Others had tried and crashed, but he'd made it, and set up the first radar, and Venus was open at last. So Farrel Blaine was a big guy from then on—but was he so big he couldn't even talk to a guy like me?

The Glades went on and on, and the trac-car went on and on. My arms got tired, and Blaine spelled me a couple of times, but the wheel shook him around a lot. He might have been tough stuff once, but he was soft, now.

He looked pretty tired by the time we camped for the night on a big hummock. He brought a bottle out of his bags, and I had a couple of drinks, and he had more than a couple. He sat staring into the dark outside our circle of light, and had another drink, and said, "It's a haunted world."

I got what he meant, and I said, "Yeah, there were all those Vennies when you first came."

"Not at first," said Blaine. "They were frightened, at first. It was only after the first few days that they started to approach us. And they were still scared—muddy beggars like poor beginnings of men, staring and staring at us."

He had another drink. "We gave them sugar. And bright bits of metal. And death."

"But *you* didn't," I said. "It was all those Earth viruses, afterward, that did it."

"Sure," said Farrel Blaine. "But I was the first. I let the others in. And in a dozen years—no more Vennies."

He handed me the bottle. "How does it feel, Wimer, to drink with a murderer?"

He was half drunk. I knew that, but even so, that jolted me. It would jolt you, sitting out there with one guy, and all the dark of Venus around you. Then I caught on.

"Say, listen, Mr. Blaine, you surely don't blame yourself for what happened to the Vennies!"

"I let the Earth in here, Wimer. The Earth ships, and the Earth men, and the Earth death."

"But it wasn't anybody's fault!" I said. "How could people know our viruses would hit the Vennies like that? Didn't we get plenty of viruses from them?"

"The difference," said Blaine, "is that we had the science to fight theirs—but the Vennies didn't have any science to fight ours. Sure, our people tried to save them. But they didn't."

"It's still not *your* fault! If you hadn't opened up Venus, somebody else would—"

Blaine said, "It is impossible but that offences will come. But woe unto him through whom they come!"

IT SOUNDED like the Bible he was quoting, and it made me more uneasy yet, this big shot drunk and quoting the Bible to me. If he blew his top up here in the Glades, I'd be in a sweet spot.

I said, "Anyway, we ought to turn in. We got a long way to go tomorrow to reach the place I told you about."

Blaine didn't make any fuss. He said,

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"All right, Wimer—it's up to you. After all, I came all the way here from Earth on your say-so."

That knocked me cold. That was something I hadn't even dreamed. "You mean—you saw that newspaper squib they ran about me seeing Vennies?"

He nodded. "That was it. I wanted to find out for sure if there could be any of them left."

He didn't say any more. Just rolled up in his dew-sheet and went to sleep, and left me lying there beside him, sweating.

I had plenty to sweat about. I was responsible for Farrel Blaine, one of the most famous men alive. And Blaine was off his rocker!

He wasn't ordinary crazy. But he'd been brooding, all these years, about the Vennies dying, and blaming himself. What the psychos call a guilt complex.

It didn't make sense. Of course it didn't make sense. The Vennies had died, and the Earthmen had done everything to save them and couldn't, and that was that. But because Blaine had been first here, he'd blamed himself.

And if he blows his top completely up here, I'm for it, I thought.

Why the devil had I ever yapped about seeing Vennies? After all, I wasn't sure—not real sure. And it had brought me nothing but trouble. If anything happened to Blaine, it'd get me busted higher than a kite.

We wouldn't find any Vennies, it was pretty sure. What would Blaine do when we didn't? I worried, and I sweated.

Next morning, Blaine didn't say anything. Not until we'd got going again, and were bumping through the Glades.

Then he said, "Don't worry, Wimer. I'm not going to get you into trouble."

He wasn't dumb. He'd figured me pretty close. Maybe I'd had worry all over my face. I told him, "Look, Mr. Blaine, I'm only a Corps private, it's not for me to tell you anything, but—"

"But I ought to forget about the Vennies," he finished for me. "Yes, I know. I told myself that, for years. I was Farrel Blaine, the great space-pioneer. I got rich; I got married; I had children. I was happy—until I thought of Venus, of the lonely grass, the emptiness, the silence, where they had once been but would never be again."

I didn't know what to say. Finally, I said, "But even if you found the ones I saw, there'd only be a few. Not like it used to be."

"Two would be enough, Wimer. Just two could start the race again. The race I thought I murdered."

There wasn't any answer to that. He had a complex, and he couldn't get over it, and I couldn't argue him out of it. There was nothing I could do but keep driving north.

Blaine didn't talk much, after that. He sat slumped, but there wasn't anything relaxed about him. His eyes seemed to speed out ahead of us, as though the car was too slow, as though he couldn't wait.

I'd brought out the survey-maps the colonel had given me. It was while we were running survey-lines up here that I'd seen them, or thought I'd seen them. I headed for that big hummock, one almost a mile across.

We left the car in the grass, and went in. I showed Blaine the place in the brush. "It was right about here. They were running that way. I only saw their legs."

"We'll search the whole hummock," he said.

We did. He was somehow cold calm now, as though he didn't care if we found anything. That made me more uneasy than if he'd been twitching.

WE DIDN'T find anything. Nothing but a few big lizards that crashed off into the brush. We didn't even find any tracks, though the rains could have washed those out.

I looked at him. "Now what?"

"We'll look through the nearby hummocks, Wimer."

I didn't like this. He acted as though we'd keep searching till we found something. And I was dead sure now we wouldn't—I was sure now it was only lizards I'd glimpsed.

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But we had to bump over to the next hummock, and look around in it. It was late afternoon, Blaine dripping with sweat and me almost as bad. Back at Base, the guys would be lounging around the barracks by now, and—

Blaine said, "Look here, Wimer."

He said it so flatly I didn't realize what it was until I went over to him. Then I saw. It was a little shelter of dry fonds, a sort of wretched tumble-down hut, almost like an animal's den.

"It could be old," I said finally.

"Look at those frond-ends—not yet completely dried out. It's not old. You saw them, Wimer."

I stared at the miserable little heap. I still couldn't quite believe it, myself. The Vennies had been gone so long that it was like seeing a fresh dinosaur-track, back on Earth.

They weren't all gone. There were at least some—a few—alive. It was sort of staggering, to look around the bush and think they might be right near us.

Then I stopped looking around, and looked at one place. A place where there were two big gray blobs under the brush. The blobs had eyes that looked back at me.

I guess I laughed, without meaning to. I said, "All right, Spafford, you loud-mouth—so I'm a liar."

Queer, how you pop out things like that when you get a surprise. Blaine said, "What—?" I said. "Look. Vennies. You're famous again, all over. So am I. We're both famous."

The Vennies just looked at us. There were two of them, huddled there. They looked at us, afraid.

They were like Blaine had said—like muddy beginnings of men. Like big, scared, hunkering monkeys, only with that muddy coarse-grained skin instead of hair. Their eyes were big and didn't wink.

I hate to call them a man and a woman, for they certainly weren't that. But I don't know how else to say it. The man gripped a sharpened wood spear. The woman held something that looked like a big, slimy frog, but it was a Vennie baby.

Blaine didn't raise his voice. He said, "Keep back, Wimer."

He must have dreamed of this, a long time, finding these Vennies. But he didn't show any emotion, not now.

He went a little toward them. He stopped and said, in a soft voice, "Friend. Friend."

The Vennies didn't make any sound, or do anything.

Blaine sat down on the ground. He told me, over his shoulder, "Get the square brown plastic box out of my bag."

All the way to the trac-car and back, I got more excited. I kept thinking what they'd say at Base about this, what they'd say back on Earth. I kept seeing my own name in bigger and bigger letters, in the headlines of Earth newspapers. I pictured myself on the telecasts, and in big pompous halls, making speeches. Societies I couldn't remember the names of would give me medals. Maybe I'd write a book, "I Found the Last of the Vennies." I—

Blaine pulled me up short, cursing me quietly for making too much noise. He took the box and began to open it. I looked at the Vennies. They hadn't moved, except the woman had turned her body around so it was between us and the wretched little creature she had in her arms. She watched us over her shoulder, and the man watched us, and I whispered to Blaine, "Why don't they run away? They ran fast enough when I saw them that first time."

HE SHOOK his head, like he didn't want to be bothered. Or maybe he knew the answer already and didn't want to admit it. He was taking stuff out of the box. "Special food," he said, still in that soft crooning voice that was supposed to make the Vennies feel easier. "Drugs. I brought them all the way from Earth." He moved forward, real slow and careful, saying "Friend . . . friend." He didn't go too close. He put the stuff down on the ground and moved back again, and waited.

"They used to hunt the big lizards for meat," he told me, "like the Ituri pyg-

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mies hunt elephants, in packs. Now there's only the two of them, and the baby. They must be living on roots and grass. They must be half starved."

They must have been, because after a while the man made a sudden rush out and grabbed up the nasty mess—it looked nasty to me and I didn't ask Blaine what it was supposed to simulate. He retreated with it and began to gobble, while the woman looked on. "Nice guy," I said, and Blaine whispered, "Wait."

It was pretty obvious that the man could have wrapped himself around the whole container-full and six more like it. But he didn't. He ate half and no more, and gave the other half to the woman. "All right," I said. "So I take it back."

Blaine leaned forward, and I could see the lines in his face getting deeper. For a minute I didn't catch on. The woman seemed to be trying to feed her baby, sticking her finger first into the container and then into the child's mouth, which I thought was normal enough. But the kid wasn't having any. It made a weak little croaking sound and turned its head away, and I heard Blaine groan. "It's sick."

"Maybe it's too young to eat that way. Maybe it just doesn't like the grub." I didn't care much one way or the other. Most baby things are appealing, but this one was too much like a toad for me to break my heart over. I just wanted to make Blaine feel better.

I don't think he even heard me. The woman kept pawing at the baby, trying to make it eat. Finally she gave up and gobbled a bit herself, but her heart wasn't in it. Blaine said heavily, "That's why they didn't run away."

"You mean, she's sick too?"

Blaine nodded. He looked sick himself. "It isn't fair," he whispered. "After all these years—they're the last ones, the very last, and I've found them, but too late—"

He turned on me, all of a sudden. "We won't *let* it be too late! If I can get enough food into them—there's antibiotics in it that can keep them going till we get them back to Base—"

"Back to Base?" I squawked. "You mean haul *them* in our trac-car?"

The Vennies were hunkering under their bush, staring at us. The woman hung tight to the baby. It croaked once in a while, and the woman had spells of shivering.

They stunk. Even here in the open air, they stunk to high heaven. The idea of having them in the car with us turned my stomach.

Blaine didn't even get what I meant. He said, "We can get them to the hospital at Base in time, if we can just win their confidence, get them to trust us—"

I knew right then I might as well keep my mouth shut. You can't argue with a fanatic, especially when he's a big shot.

"Okay," I said. "Go ahead."

He tried. He offered them more food, and then bright trinkets he'd brought. But each time he got too close the man would snarl and warn him off with that sharp stick, and the woman would curl protectively around the baby until you'd have thought she'd crush it.

Night came on, hot and dank with the heavy dew. I made camp a little way off where the stink of the Vennies wouldn't reach me. I heard Blaine's voice, mumbling away about how he was a friend. Finally, he came over and sat down beside me.

"Well?" I asked.

He shook his head. "I could make friends with them, in time. But there isn't much time left, if we're to save that baby."

He sat brooding. I told him, "It looks pretty far gone, to me."

OUR circle of light just touched the Vennies. The baby barely moved any more, and its croaking whispers were so faint you could hardly hear them. I rustled some grub, which Blaine hardly tasted, and then rolled up in my dew-sheet. I didn't get much sleep. Blaine kept waking me up talking to the Vennies, still in there pitching to them how he was their friend. It was wasted effort. By morning the baby was dead.

You'd have thought, to look at Blaine,

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that it was his own kid. I just kept my mouth shut and waited. After a while the man took it from the woman's arms. She didn't make much fuss, and with her there was no telling where one misery ended and another began. Looking at their stinking wretchedness, I thought if Blaine ended their race he'd done them a favor, but I didn't dare say so.

The man took the dead child and went away with it into the brush. He kept snarling back at us, as he went. Blaine said, "Don't go near the woman he's afraid we'll harm her while he's gone."

He came back after a while, and didn't have the baby. The woman hadn't budged. He felt her all over to make sure she wasn't hurt, and then hunkered down beside her and glowered at us.

I was sick of the whole sordid business. I didn't want to be the guy who discovered Vennies, any more. I said, "So now what?"

Blaine wouldn't give up. "They can have more children," he said. "But the woman has to be got to Base hospital. It's now or never."

He told me to pack up, and wait in the car. He'd try to persuade them. I saw him sitting down with them, babbling his "Friend . . . friend," that they couldn't understand, and pointing and making gestures. I packed up and then sat and waited in the trac-car, hoping that Blaine would fail.

But he didn't. He got them to come, God knows how. They came with him, scared and slow, the man helping the shivering woman and ready to use his sharpened stick on us, Blaine talking soothingly to them at every step.

He got them into the back of the trac-car, and I just sat there at the wheel, and didn't turn around, like he ordered. The skin crawled on my back, and it wasn't just the stink of them that did it. It's all very well to talk about meeting up with aliens and being friendly. You go and try it.

Blaine told me to start easy and quiet. I did, but I could hear the man snarling when the motor started, and Blaine talking soothing. I think if the man hadn't been so dazed by the baby's death and the woman's being sick, he'd never have come that far.

We rolled. We pushed south hour after hour through the grass. The ceiling held up, and that made it easier, but the heat and the smog and the smell we carried with us made it tough enough. I cursed myself that I'd ever seen those Vennies and talked about it.

Blaine told me twice to stop, and he gave the woman drugs. Then an hour before dark, he told me we'd have to camp at the next hummock. "She can't go any farther today," he said.

I looked at her. "She can't go any farther, period."

He flared out at me. "Damn you, Wimer, don't say that. I'll get some shots into her. You make camp."

I did, pretty sulkily, when we reached the hummock. I saw Blaine working over the muddy, shivering thing like it was his own wife. The man just sat and watched quiet, as though somehow he trusted Blaine more now.

WHEN Blaine finally came over to me, he didn't eat but fished another bottle out of his bag and we had a couple of big slugs.

"She'll be all right," he said. He didn't look as though he believed it.

He ate a little, but drank more. Time to time, he looked back at the shadows, at the man-thing hunkering beside the shivering one on the ground.

The way Blaine looked, I felt kind of sorry for him and got over my sulkiness. He was a fanatic, all right, but he was really sweating this out.

"Take it easy," I said. "There isn't anything more you can do."

"I'm not trying to do anything," he said. "I'm trying to undo something. And this is my last chance."

He kept drinking. Every once in a while he'd get up and go over to the Vennies, saying his "Friend . . . friend," and looking at the woman, and then he'd come back and have another drink. He got pretty drunk. He talked.

He said, "Why didn't we stay on

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Earth, that was given to us for our own world? Why, Wimer?"

"You sound like one of those religious cranks who were all against space travel."

"Maybe. Maybe I do. But just suppose the cranks were right?"

I said, "Oh, hell. I don't love this place, and maybe it wasn't so bright our coming here, but why bring sin into it?"

"Because we may have sinned, Wimer. Whoever made things put us on Earth, and put the Vennies here, and put a wall around each world, around every world, to keep it to itself. And we wouldn't keep to ourselves; we struggled and scrambled and planned till we climbed the wall that had been put around us, and maybe that was sin, sin against the way things were intended."

I said, "You talk like it was all unnatural, coming here. But we were bound to get to these other worlds, sooner or later. Everybody always knew that."

"Yes, they knew it. I knew it. I knew we had to come, and I came first, and I didn't think, none of us thought, that we were changing things forever, doing something unforgivable."

I was tired, and his wild talk got on my nerves, and so did what was over in the shadows. I rolled up and said:

"We got a long way to go tomorrow."

I heard him drink, and throw the empty away, and go over to the Vennies and then come back again. I slept.

I woke, and it was all over, just like that. Blaine had wakened me with a queer hoarse sound, and he was running toward the Vennies. When I got there, he was stooping over them.

The woman was dead. And the man had run his wooden spear into his own heart and was dying too. We ought to have foreseen it. He was human enough for that. When the woman died, and he was the last, he didn't want to live.

Blaine just sagged there, all his hopes and all the crazy dream that had brought him back to Venus, dying there with them. The Vennie looked up at him—he looked sick and scared, like anyone who knows he's dying, but something else too. He said something that sounded like "Vran," and made like to touch Blaine, and then he was dead too.

Well, I admit I felt a little relief, at first. I'd been sorry for them, but though they were pitiful they were also sort of disgusting, and anyway it had all been hopeless from the first. But Blaine still held that dead, stinking creature, and he had tears in his eyes. "He was trying to say 'Friend,'" he said.

I don't know, maybe he was. I guess he'd been smart enough to catch the word he'd heard so often from Blaine. And he had trusted Blaine.

Somehow, it made me feel a little different about the Vennies. I mean, seeing the last of them die like that.

Blaine helped me bury them. He didn't want to take their bodies down to Base. He said, "I don't think we need tell anyone we found them."

We started on. We rolled south. Blaine didn't say anything, and I worried about that until finally I said:

"Look, Mr. Blaine, you made a good try, but it was no dice, and I wouldn't worry about Vennies any more."

He didn't take it wrong, like I'd been afraid he would. He just said, "I won't worry any more. I did wrong, but I was forgiven."

Can you tie that? A big guy like Farrel Blaine, a rich guy, a famous guy, eating his heart out for years over a guilt-complex, and then getting over it just because that wretched thing tried to say a word? But he was a fanatic, for sure.

He went back to Earth. And I went back to my work with the Corps, like before. But somehow, it doesn't all seem quite the same here now.

I mean, it looks the same but it *feels* different, somehow. Out in the Glades in the daytime, and in the dark around the barracks at night, it all feels too quiet, too empty.

I guess Blaine's talk got on my nerves. I keep remembering what he said about our leaving Earth not being intended. You don't suppose there's anything in that, do you? Before, I'd have said it was only crank's talk. But now, I don't know. I just don't know.

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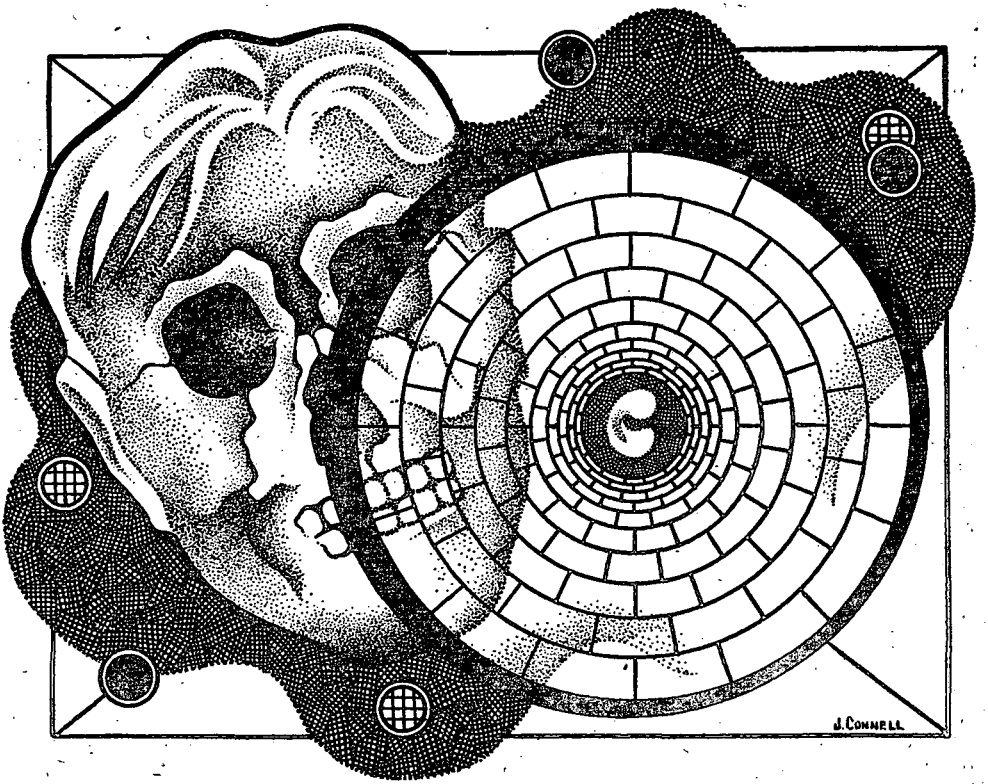

Out of the Well

By TOM McMORROW, JR.

He had a will of iron, but it couldn't forge the future

JASON RANDALL was dying. Of course the papers were careful about it, as they have to be. "Near death" was the way some put it. You can be near it, you know, without getting there. "Ex-Senator sinking fast," said others. There's a handy difference between sinking and sunk.

But Jason Randall was sunk. He was going all the way. Braumeyer knew it, because it was his business to know. He was the top specialist in the line, which was why they'd called him in. One look at the patient's cyanotic face had told him the story even before his examination, but this was no ordinary patient, and for publication he said simply, "Critical."

The reporters knew it, and they made bets among themselves as to how long he'd last, and the old-timers rolled out tales of other death-watches they'd sat out. It was a fairly pleasant assignment. You could relax—the subject wasn't go-

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ing to duck out on you. The obits were already written, and this wasn't a death that would intrude any twinge of personal loss into your professional callousness.

Of course the young man from *The Guardian Challenger* was pretty glum, but he didn't count among the regulars. Most of them had never met him or read his publication. He sulked and glowered at their jokes. It was their kind who had made Jason Randall an ex-Senator. Why, there was even a Negro among them, whom the rest were treating as an equal. And under the Senator's own roof! Disgraceful. Shocking.

Jason Randall had met them all, during the course of his career, including the lanky dark-skinned man, to whom he had been elaborately polite. It was an interview he had re-enacted many times, to the delight of his friends. Especially cute they found his clever mimicry of the college Negro's courtly phraseology.

Then there was the young man called Bolan, from the *Review*. During the last campaign he had interviewed the Senator in a manner of insinuation that pleased the great man not a bit. And so Jason had countered with a tactic for which he was famous: parrying question with question.

"Would you mind telling me, young man," Jason had interrupted bluntly, "just what you are?"

Bolan had looked at him uncomprehendingly. "I *beg* your pardon?"

"Your nationality, sir."

"Oh." Bolan's face had remained blank. "I thought you knew—American."

"I didn't mean that. Are you Irish? Italian? Are you a Jew?"

This obtuse sort of attack usually broke through their composure and brought forth a lot of embarrassed spluttering that proved Jason Randall had scored again. But Bolan had just smiled and said, "I'll have to see your press-card before I submit to an interview, Senator."

"Just a friendly question, man to man," replied the Senator suavely, but he marked the reporter as an impertinent upstart.

Bolan had risen. "Well, I'm sorry. I can't think of a friendly answer. Good day, Senator."

A Jew, of course, with a changed name. Features could have been Irish, but imagine any Irish-American replying to "What are you?" in any way but "I'm Irish!" Of course the Irish that Jason Randall knew were a highly select breed, and he assumed with characteristic boldness that they were representative.

Just for his own amusement, he'd put one of his investigators to work on young Bolan. But he'd reaped more annoyance than amusement, for the report came back that both Bolan's parents had emigrated from County Kilkenny.

That investigator got no more assignments from Jason Randall. Jason had never really trusted the fellow—some kind of a Greek, he was.

And now Jason Randall was sinking, and almost sunk.

Further and further down the well he sank, and the light at the top kept getting dimmer. He kept watching it. If I keep my eyes open I can't go to sleep. If I keep looking at the light I can't die. . . .

Braumeyer . . . German specialist, eh? . . . Why doesn't he save me? . . . Maybe he's a Jew. Sounds German, sure, but that Meyer part . . . you never can tell. . . .

It's getting darker. I refuse to die. But it's getting so black . . . marvelous that it can be this black, and with my eyes open . . .

And then there came to Jason Randall, as it comes to all men, the moment when he saw and knew all truth, of heaven and hell, what had been and what would be. And it was the most awful moment he had ever known.

And then the moment passed, and he forgot it, as men must, and . . .

. . . it was awfully still where he was, and he could not move, and for a long while he knew nothing.

When consciousness of himself next

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returned, he knew that if he did not fight his way up out of the well into life this time, he would surely die, and be dead forever. And so he struggled, put forth mighty efforts to move his feeble body. He would defeat death—he would!

"YES," said Braumeyer slowly, *"The pulse is faint, but it is still-there. You will have to assist me, Mr. Johnson."*

Jason Randall did not know how long he fought to return to the world of life, sleeping for brief stretches and then resuming the battle, but his strength increased with each effort, and finally he knew that the moment was at hand.

And now, unaccountably, he felt fear, and there was pain, but the giant effort must be made.

"Now, Mr. Johnson," Braumeyer called, *"Come quickly—quickly!"*

Feeling the resurging strength of his body billow to a climax, Jason Randall threw all of it into his final try. And he succeeded. And he saw the light.

At that moment, Jason Randall ceased to be Jason Randall, and became a person without a name, which was not remarkable at all, since he had just been born.

Helmut Braumeyer held him up for his mother to see. He was a fine, healthy specimen, a bit darker in color than his mother's chocolate brown, closer to the rich full-blooded blackness of his father.

"It's a boy, Mrs. Johnson," Braumeyer announced softly.

The mother smiled weakly and held out her arms. He gave her the child.

Later the father spoke to him in the front room: "Doctah—your chauffeur tell me you a famous specialist. Ah'm 'fraid ah cain't give you what you worth, Doctah. This is all ah got—"

Braumeyer smiled and closed the young man's black fist around the money.

"Keep it. That baby's going to need a lot of equipment. He's a fine boy." He picked up his Homburg. "I don't make my living this way, you know. I deal with old people—rich old people, and they're usually dying. It's meant something to me to have dealt with birth for a change. It made me feel useful again. I'm glad I was passing by when your little emergency happened."

"Please—take somethin', Doctah."

"Absolutely not. You made a highly efficient assistant. If anything's owed, it's I who owe you a fee. Good-by, my boy, and good luck."

As Helmut Braumeyer made his way to his car, he reconsidered his own words. It was true—he was constantly occupied with rich old people, traveling from deathbed to deathbed. How refreshing was infant purity contrasted to the degradation of age, degradation like —well, like Jason Randall's. His most famous patient, now nine months cold in the grave.

Nine months. That meant the Johnson baby had got started on his life cycle about the time old Jason was bowing out. Well, the little black fellow was fortunate in one respect, thought Braumeyer, as his chauffeur closed him in the car. His color might make life hard for him, but he could never become a Jason Randall, and that was something to be grateful for.

Read BOOBY PRIZE, a novelet by GEORGE O. SMITH,

and other Science-fiction headliners in the August issue of—

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OVERLOAD

It was the old story of Humpty Dumpty once more—

and even the cyberneticians couldn't put Everett

Lawrence's poor cracked dome together again. . . .

I WISH," said the Minister of Interplanetary Affairs wearily, "that you would not keep insisting on invoking the Research Immunity Act."

Harry Sanders' pale blue eyes joined for an instant with those of physiologist Allan Wyatt, who sat across the table from him. To the government man he said, "Mr. Padilla, you know as well as I that we'll be trying new things. You wouldn't turn Lawrence over to us if you *didn't* think so; after all, your best psychiatrists have failed. It won't be the first time an insoluble dilemma has been handed over to the Cybernetics Institute. I'm afraid, sir, that unless the Immunity Act is included in our contract—no contract."

Padilla brushed a trembling hand across his balding head. "Naturally, naturally, but in this day and age the scientist is high in public favor. Not in thirty years has the Act been invoked; I rather resent—"

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a novelet by ED M. CLINTON, JR.

Allan Wyatt's gravel baritone interrupted him. "In this day and age, we don't ordinarily have research scientists going schizoid in the middle of secret government projects halfway to Pluto. I think," he said with obvious finality, "that under the circumstances, immunity will have to be spelled out."

Padilla stared intently at Wyatt for a moment. "I wish I knew—never mind. So be it." He began stuffing papers into his briefcase. "I'll have the contract brought over late this afternoon. When will you want Lawrence?"

Harry Sanders could hardly control the excitement that edged his voice. "We'll have quarters for him set up by tomorrow, for your inspection and approval. We'd like to start work immediately."

Padilla sealed the briefcase between thumb and forefinger and rose. "Very well. Until—success."

He pattered to the door. It slid open

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as he stepped on the treadle, and he hesitated, turned, and smiled wanly. "Remember, I'm depending on you."

Sanders nodded silently and watched Padilla move down the corridor until the closing door cut off his view. He grinned broadly at Wyatt. "Well, boy, we've got our man!"

Wyatt's cheerful growl formed into a rumbling laugh. "Sort of thrown in our laps," he chuckled. "I had visions of a real struggle getting someone." He was suddenly serious. "Know something, Harry? I wouldn't trust that bird Padilla with my worst enemy."

"Too bad," mused Sanders, "that *he* isn't our victim. I'd *love* to find out what was going on behind that honest face." He rose and ran his fingers through his hair. "Let's get hold of Mortimer, Allan. We'll need a good neuro-surgeon on this, and they don't come any better."

MORTIMER BANKS, a tiny old man with a thick profusion of pure white hair, watched as Allan Wyatt unlocked the door and stepped on the treadle. The laboratory was a seldom-used one, in an older part of the building. "This must be high-powered stuff, Harry," muttered Banks as they filed in. "Old, unused lab, locked doors, big secrets—"

"I guess it is kind of high-powered, Mortimer," Sanders nodded. He tossed his heat repellant cape across the back of a chair. "Damn, it's hot in here, Allan."

"This is an old lab. No air-conditioning, I fear."

"Oh," murmured Banks, "is that it?" He limped over to the big ovoid in the middle of the room. "How long's that dog been in there, you say?" He squinted his eyes and studied the figure of the animal, a brown cocker that floated, suspended, in the center of the ovoid. Its fine fur radiated in all directions in the slightly-bluish fluid that filled the egg-shaped tank, each hair absolutely unmoving in the still solution.

"He's been in there two months," said Wyatt, a tinge of pride in his voice.

"Theoretically, of course," Banks was saying, almost to himself, as he walked around the tank, inspecting it, "this sort of 'suspended animation' has been feasible for a long time." He tapped an electrical control board. "I suppose you use this to maintain colloidal suspension."

Wyatt came over and checked the board, a gesture of habit. "That was the nut. The proper potentiality, properly controlled . . . just enough charge to keep the beasty from coagulating."

Sanders was astraddle a chair, arms folded under his chin and resting on the back of the chair. "Allan," he said abruptly, "that's a beautiful thing. That dog, floating in that stuff, alive after two months. . . ."

"I'm impressed, boys," nodded Banks, white hair bobbing.

Sanders laughed, swung off the chair and led the older man across the laboratory. "Come see my contribution, Mortimer." His tone changed, and he frowned a bit. "Come take a look at the world of a dog." He threaded one of several reels of transparent tape into the gearing system of a machine that looked like the offspring of a mating of projector and video, with just a taint of an X-ray machine in its ancestry.

Banks touched one of the several cathode tubes that rimmed its edge. Sanders handed him two tiny earphones, plugged their wire leaders into the base of the machine. "Fit those in your ears, Mortimer. Try these goggles on for size."

The neuro-surgeon examined the thick-lensed, heavily padded set of optics. "They're opaque," he objected.

"They're little video screens, really. Put them on." Sanders unfouled the electric line leading to them and plugged it in, alongside the earphone wires. He snapped on the machine, and it hummed softly.

"It'll take a moment to warm up, Mortimer. Now, I'm going to leave this thing on for about five seconds. You couldn't take much more, not without knowing just what you were getting into. Please notice, Mortimer, that I have not

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connected the olfactory, taste or tactile reproducers—that would be entirely too much."

"I tried it once. The taste mechanism!" Wyatt made a face and gave a shudder that radiated from his shoulders through the beef of his body. "Very unpleasant."

Banks fidgeted nervously. "You've got me all excited, Harry. Warmed up yet?"

Sanders checked a couple of gauges, made sure the tape was properly threaded, saying, "Yes, I think so. This course not. You never looked through the eyes of a dog before. You never heard through a dog's ear before." Finished, he turned and leaned back tensely against the side of the big machine. "Of course, the reproduction is no more than that—a reproduction. Those are impressions from the nervous system of a dog, interpreted by the nervous system of a human."

Banks went back to the huge ovoid in the center of the laboratory. "And if this poor creature should be removed from there, now. Awakened. . . ."

Storehouse of Knowledge

STRONG as is the survival instinct, it is often brushed aside by the even more compelling need of the individual for self-respect. Losing face he will prefer death to disgrace. Confronted by a dilemma too great for his mind to resolve, he will sometimes escape into insanity.

Aside from the psychological problems this suggests, it poses a mechanical one which is fascinating. What could we learn if we knew the secret of unlocking memory and running off, as on a moving picture reel, the millions upon millions of impressions stored in the brain cells of a man? What an incredible document—and what a storehouse of knowledge could thus be tapped. The fact that this might make an arresting story is ably demonstrated in this fine novelet by a new author. ***—The Editor***

is one of the last reels, so it involves the impressions of a very mature cocker spaniel. Ready? Here goes!"

He flipped another switch, and the tape began to feed through. He kept his hand against the control, watching Banks intently.

The old man straightened, muttered something under his breath. Suddenly he began to claw at the goggles.

Sanders flipped the switch back. Wyatt helped Banks remove the goggles, pulled out the earplugs.

"My God in heaven!" gasped Mortimer Banks. "That is truly remarkable! I have never in my life seen anything to compare—"

SANDERS turned off the machine, began to coil the wire leaders. "Of

"He would begin life without a single shred of past experience," said Wyatt. "It is all—" he pointed at the pile of tape reels—"over there, on those. Like a sponge, everything he has ever experienced has been sopped up by those reels."

Banks folded his hands behind his back and bowed his head in thought. "And what's it all mean?"

"Ever analyze how a tridem movie is produced?" Sanders interjected. "After all the thousands and thousands of feet of film are shot, they are edited. The bad parts are cut, and the whole thing is given a flow, a continuity."

"Then—" began Banks, pointing a stubby finger at the stack of reels.

"That's right, Mortimer. Suppose you could edit a man's memory! More spe-

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cifically, suppose you could edit the memory of a psychotic."

Banks' tiny eyes glittered. "You could cut out the worry pattern—" he looked at each of them in turn. "Why, Harry, there is no limit—"

Sanders threw a husky arm around the old man's frail shoulders. "Mortimer, we'd like you to help us. We're going to try it on a man, now—an infinitely more difficult task. If it works, it will open up whole fields of research. Think of it—everything a man is, all laid out before you, in the finest detail."

"I presume," ventured Banks, "that you have a specific subject in mind."

Sanders picked up his cape and started toward the door. "Been reading the papers lately?"

"Not Lawrence!"

"I mean Lawrence. The Everett Lawrence who ended up staring at nothing about four months back."

They followed him through the door. "Harry," exclaimed Banks, "did they tell you what that secret project was?"

"No." Sanders grinned. "But chances are Everett Lawrence will."

"There are a lot of nervous politicians on Venus and here on Earth that would like to know what Padilla is up to," observed Banks drily as they stepped into the tubeway.

FOR all of his nearly fifty years, Harry Sanders still bubbled with the endless enthusiasm of youth. He went at anything he did with an unquenchable optimism that, somehow, seemed to achieve results regardless of obstacles. When he had worked out the functional mechanics of the trans-North American commute system, when at the request of the Interworld Physical Foundation he had devised the operating principles of the long-needed Analytic Multiple Choice Calculator—then and for all time the Anumule to men of science—and when he had played a major part in half a dozen other upper-drawer scientific achievements, he had gone at it with much of the wide-eyed amazement of a small boy with a complex toy. "This won't change the world," he liked to say about his work, "but it'll help."

Nor did he react differently to this newest project. One who did not know him well might have considered him flippant in his regard of Everett Lawrence as a fascinating subject for a fascinating experiment.

The psychiatric, character and personal history dossier on that unfortunate man indicated one thing to Sanders and his two co-workers: quite clearly the physicist was a worrier. It was not an unusual thing for men who worked around forces and equations that could blow whole worlds apart; even a trained mind can suffer nightmares at the realization that the push of a button might wreck civilization.

"He worried himself into it," said Allan Wyatt.

But the government maintained a tight-lipped silence on the nature of the project in which Lawrence had been engaged. "We did not call you in to solve our research problems," Padilla told Sanders. "You are a cybernetics engineer, and it is our feeling that if anyone can give Lawrence a structural re-education, it's *you*."

Sanders went back to his lab alternately cursing and grinning. Shirtless in the sweltering summer heat, barefoot, hands clasped behind his gray head and leaning far back in a form-fitting chair, he shouted out to Banks and Wyatt the facts that were—Everett Lawrence.

"Everett Lawrence. Physicist, nuclear and sub-nuclear specialist. Age, fifty-nine. Graduate Venusian Nuclear Research Institute. Subject matter of his doctorate? 'Probable End Products of Element 104 as a Fuel.' Associated with the Mercury Outpost Expedition. Assistant Director Atomic Fuels Project. Later Director. Achievements there: the Lawrence Space Overdrive. The Radium Thrust. The Lawrence-Moroni element 103 delayed stability process. Later the same for 104." He charged to his feet and glared over Banks' shoulder as the aged neuro-surgeon put the finishing touches on a fierce-looking helmet of

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tubes and needles that would one day ride astride the brain of Everett Lawrence. "Mortimer . . . Allan! Do they think we're stupid? Where was he when he broke down? He was on Ceres . . . of all places, Ceres. Did *you* know there was a lab on Ceres?"

Wyatt was briskly scratching the ear of the dog that had lately lived in the ovoid that still occupied the center of the lab. "And your conclusion, Harry?"

"Even the dog could figure it out, Allan. *The stars! The stars!* It figures. I'll eat my shirt if they're not working out there on a new fuel, something that might blow the Three Planets clear to Sirius, so they've put the lab out there where a disaster wouldn't hurt any of the Planets, a place within reach of our spaceships but far enough from shipping lanes to be safe. As sure as life and death, they're working on something out there that'll goose a spaceship out to the stars."

He kneeled down and thumped his thigh. "Here, Sleeper." The dog bounded over, its tail wagging in a wide, erratic arc, and buried its head on his lap. He rubbed its back exuberantly. "Good as ever, eh, fellah? My, my, what the boys upstairs wouldn't say if they knew about you!"

By the time Banks had completed his physiological profile of Lawrence—from basal metabolism and katabolism and blood count through colloidal suspension factor and cerebral wave pattern—summer was all but dead and the first red leaves of autumn were strewn across the Institute grounds. Wyatt's solutions and serums had to wait for that full report, and all the while Harry Sanders thought a little, calculated some, sketched a bit, would slouch back awkwardly in his chair and think some more, until bit by bit his machinery took form, partly in his mind and partly on the drawing board.

"We're doing everything in our power," was his prim reply to the hysterical demands for results that emanated from the Office of Interplanetary Affairs. "This is going to be a long process. Besides, I don't see how one man could hold up an entire laboratory. . . ."

"We could go on, but we'd rather have Lawrence," was Padilla's brittle reply. Sanders scratched his chin and wondered what had Padilla scared.

FIFTY research physicists struggled furiously with pages of formulae and volumes of figures on a tiny rock of a world beyond the orbit of Mars, searching fearfully for the terrible fact which had driven Everett Lawrence out of his mind. The government of Three Planets stood impatiently on its ear, and the blank eyes of a terrified physicist stared into nothingness, while Harry Sanders sucked on a pipe, thought, and doodled on a piece of paper. . . .

Everett Lawrence had been a handsome man in his youth, but work and worry had gashed his face with deep lines and a great sadness, deepened now by the yawning emptiness that looked out from eyes that had once sparkled with genius.

"We're gonna find out, Lawrence, why you're not listening to me," muttered Sanders between clenched teeth as Wyatt began shaving the physicist's head. "Something worried you into this, old man, and we're gonna find it and cut it out and throw it away."

Lawrence, stripped to the skin, stared ahead with unseeing eyes, his thin shoulders hunched forward as he crouched tensely in the chair, his bony chest rising and falling tremulously to his uncertain breathing.

Sanders looked up. "Done, Allan?"

The pudgy physiologist nodded. "Bare as a—"

"All set, Mortimer?"

"All set, Harry," came Banks' frail voice from across the lab.

Sanders checked the wiring, something he had done half a hundred times before, and then helped Wyatt carry the physicist over to the operating table. He drew back and rubbed one set of stubby fingers against the other as Wyatt strapped the mildly protesting form into position. Banks brought the helmet over, plugged it into the massive array of

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equipment that was Sanders' control board, and clamped it on to Lawrence's shaven head. He filled a hypodermic, held it up to the light, squirted out a bit of it, then bent over Lawrence and plunged it deftly into his spine.

Instantly the physicist's eyes closed and his breathing, shallower, became regular.

Wyatt reached up and swung over above Lawrence's head a long, many-elbowed metal arm that ended in a tiny drill. His foot depressed a switch, a motor hummed, and he placed the drill against Lawrence's forehead.

Harry Sanders' mind shot back twenty years and he could recall almost word for word the elementary commentary on neural communication that had first inspired his unique research.

"Like a modern metropolitan videophone service," the article had said, "the lines of communication in the human nervous system, and particularly in the brain, are limited. When a circular worry pattern is set up, involving the use and monopoly of a steadily increasing number of channels of communication, trouble is in the offing. If the worry pattern is allowed to continue, it will soon occupy so much of the available communication system that the normal functions of that system become impaired and a breakdown of the system is the inevitable result. . . ."

Another paragraph of random thought, out of that distant past, came to him: "What do we do when an electrical calculating machine begins giving us wrong answers? The best thing, of course, is to clear it of all information and start again. We can also disconnect the part of it we think is not functioning properly, or we can send a jolt of electricity through the entire machine in an attempt to clear it . . . these two latter methods remind one of certain operations, such as frontal lobotomy, and of shock treatment, used in limited cases of human mental disorder. . . ."

But they damaged the brain. A man was never the same after you cut up his brain, or shocked it into numbed submission . . . *but if you could clear it . . .* there was the phrase that had stuck in his mind, over the years: "The best thing is to clear it of all information and start over again. . . ."

He watched, hardly breathing, while the skilled fingers of Wyatt and Banks worked over the sleeping Lawrence. One by one the little clusters of fine wire were inserted, ever so delicately, in selected areas of his cortex. It seemed like a thousand years, but it was only three hours later, that Wyatt stepped back, his face beaded with sweat, and wiped his hands a bit gingerly on his gown.

"All set, Harry," he said.

Sanders drew a deep breath, and was suddenly conscious that the palms of his hands were clammy with moisture. He pressed them together to wipe them, and then with renewed enthusiasm he went over to his control board, sat down before it, switched it on.

It hummed. He checked the threading of the tape reel, watched dials marked *Tactile Signal . . . Audio Signal . . . Visual Signal . . . Olfactory Signal . . . Taste Signal* build up, adjusted his controls until all the needles pointed, quivering, straight up

"This won't change the world," he muttered, "but it may help."

He depressed a stud. The hum increased, the reel turned, tape fed into the heart of the machine and was taken up on another reel. A row of pilot lights blinked brightly and then dimly. The visual signal swung far to the right, and he brought it back to norm. The olfactory signal fell slowly back to zero and clung, motionless, to the pin. He fought it, but it would not budge. . . .

Sanders cursed under his breath. "Wyatt! Mortimer! Something's wrong!"

Wyatt tramped over heavily. Banks said, "Everything's okay here."

Sanders said sharply, "Allan, get that physio profile. It's on the table over there." Beads of sweat stood out on his wrinkled forehead.

Wyatt moved, rapidly for a man of his bulk. He found the sheaf of papers, be-

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gan scanning through them as he brought them over. Of a sudden he stopped and began laughing.

"What's so—"

"Take it easy, Harry. This guy couldn't smell!"

Banks' ragged cackle was joined by Sanders gasp of relief. "I knew that all the time, too," he muttered.

TWENTY-SIX days and two hundred reels later, the living but lifeless body of Everett Lawrence floated unmoving in Wyatt's blue fluid in the big ovoid, and Harry Sanders was prepared for the biggest adventure of his life.

"Here," he said, almost with reverence, lying his hand atop the stack of reels, "we have a man's lifetime. Everything he is or ever has been. All his memories. His innermost secrets. Everything." In some ways it scared him, though he was not a man to be frightened by a scientific fact. Nor was it the possibility of failure that bothered him—failure was hardly a word in his vocabulary. Rather it was in something that Allan Wyatt had said: "What could an unscrupulous man do with this?" Indeed, you could make of a man what you would . . . for a man is nothing but his memories. Take away his memories, and what have you? A shell, an infant physiological function. Like the part of Everett Lawrence that floated in that huge plastic egg in the center of the lab—the rest of Lawrence was here, on these reels of tape.

Yet—there was more. These simple memories, they were but the stuff of a man's mind. One might scan for an eternity these stolen neural impressions, and not for one moment do with them what the thalamus and the striatum and neopallium of Everett Lawrence might.

Here, in its essence, was man—the man that had been, the abstractions he had made and that thus made him not an animal. But it was not and never could be the man who was to be, for those were the abstractions of that single, unique physiology labelled *Everett Lawrence* and of no other.

Could you change a man's nature this way? thought Harry Sanders as he spliced the reels together and prepared them for the analyzer. Could you edit out a man's principles? Would a man's principles be that simple, or would they be so enmeshed with the multitude of experiences that to remove the one would be to destroy the other?

The analyzer spun, and the dozen Animules began to click out their signals. With a dozen Animules, the possible number of signal labels was close enough to infinite to serve Sanders' purposes. With their aid, every single experience of Lawrence's recorded on the tape was individually labelled. The counter rattled up into the billions. And still the tape spun on.

What sort of subtle changes in the workings of a man's mind might you make Sanders wondered as the type rolled free at last and the hot Animules ceased their tireless chatter. Could you make a simpleton bright? Indeed, it seemed that if he were the victim of false values, you might cut away those damning memories and leave him with his store of information, free to evaluate in terms of the real world. Could you end forever the spark that made a genius?

The reel was rewound and the alarm board was plugged in and the Animules were reset. The tape spun through again, and the board began to chatter. Sanders, hair uncombed, a dish of candies to one side and cold pipe in hand, his shirt unbuttoned, sat from early morning until late at night, day after day, watching that board for the first suggestion of a constant, geometrically increasing repetition of the same signal, over and over again.

Dit went the board. Animule Number 3 caught the label, flashed it back to the board, filed it with Animule 4 for future reference. *Dit* went the board again, and because it was the same signal a red light began to glow on the board. *Dit-dit* said the board, and Animule 3 clattered nervously and another red light lit up. *Dit-dit-dit-dit-dit* shouted the board, and another red light went on.

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Larry Sanders sat unmoving, a chunk of candy held stiffly before his opened mouth. *Dididididididit!* yelled the board, and two more red lights glowed. Harry Sanders stood up, grinning. *Dididid . . . CLANG-CLANG-CLANG.* The whole board went red, and the machine stopped.

Sanders ran to the videophone and punched it several times. The screen cleared and bleary-eyed Allan Wyatt's florid features rolled wearily into view.

"We've got something, Allan!"

"Huh? You still down at the lab . . . yeah! Be right over. Don't lose it!"

"Don't worry!"

Wyatt arrived twenty minutes later, the fingers of sleep still tight around his eyes, with Banks. "I picked up Mortimer on the way," he noted, jiggling his thumb in the old man's direction.

Banks pushed past him and hobbled over to the red-glowing alarm board. "Looked at it yet, Harry?"

"Haven't touched it." Sanders tripped open a wall panel and drew out a large pot that emitted steam, and three cups. "I dialed into the autoteria for coffee," he said, waving the pot. He poured around. "This'll wake us up. Then let's get at it."

THEY spent the night tracing the repeating signal, locking Animule Number Three on the label, winding and rewinding the tape, each of them in turn viewing and recording. The morning sun glaring in through the window found them over their sixth pot of coffee, the floor around them strewn with crumpled cups and pots.

Sanders went over to the window and tightened the filter down a bit, talking as he did. "One thing's for sure. It *works.*" He sat down again.

"Praise be," muttered Banks. "Lordy, I haven't drunk so much coffee since I used to cram for exams."

Wyatt shook his head. "Purple people . . . that's what gets me."

"Not true, Allan," objected Sanders. He flipped through Wyatt's scribbled notes. "It just so happens that Lawrence's neural interpretation of flesh tones happens to affect your visual organism in terms of *your* purple."

"Didn't look purple to me," snapped Banks. "In fact, she struck me as some beauty."

Wyatt mused for a moment. "Well, disjointed though our picture is, we know that even if Lawrence is a bachelor, he's been through a love affair."

Sanders drained the last from his cup, shook the pot and found it empty, and crumpled up his cup and tossed it aside. "Let's go over this thing again before we turn in. First of all, we can be pretty sure that this period has nothing to do with our present problem. Lawrence was rather young at the time—you, Wyatt, indicate a fleeting memory of his seeing himself in a mirror as a handsome young man. We know for a certainty that the repetition signal was based on his constant thinking about this girl, Dona or Diana or whatever her name was. Obviously we have examined, in some detail, a very vivid and intimate part of his life, which suggests we immediately forget it unless we find later that it has some connection with our problem."

"I'm tired," yawned Wyatt, stretching vastly.

"We all are. But I want to get this threshed out while it's fresh in our minds. Then we can get some shuteye. We've learned a lot tonight, both in handling our equipment and in evaluating the results we get." He held a match over his pipe and drew on it for a moment. "Now, this we know, much as we suspected: One, we cannot with the present equipment, and probably, because of time limitation, never will interpret thoroughly detailed memory patterns. This means we are going to have to evaluate considerably, which brings in the element of personality—our own personalities, responding to his experiences."

"Along the same line, we know that our nerve receptors can and do react differently than his, to a given stimulus," put in Wyatt drowsily. "My purple

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people prove that."

"Two," continued Sanders, "we know that, just as you say, Allan, we will have to scrutinize carefully all our observations, for we know we can overlook something that does not conform to our own personal assumed-to-be-absolute response. Three, we know that our machine is much more discerning than any of us. If you will recall, we had to put the tape through three times before we spotted what it was that locked up Animule Six. How could we tell that it was Lawrence's mortification at being caught kissing a high school sweetheart that provided the psychological block preventing him from proposing to this Diana . . . or Dona, whichever? Every time Six caught and pinned it, the board got high blood pressure, but we missed it. I'll have to work on that."

Banks rubbed his nose between thumb and forefinger. "Why couldn't you install a duplicating device that would dupe only the labeled report that set off the machine?"

"I was thinking along those lines—"

He thought about it and did it, and by the time the chattering, humming horde of Animules barked out the ninety-seventh repetition signal twelve days later, a new contrivance had been added to the crouching monsters crowding the little lab, and a new roll of tape spun, was recorded upon, was rewound upon another spool, and hung waiting for the eager perusal of Sanders and his associates.

BY NOW they had come to know Everett Lawrence more intimately than any others ever had known him. The machine that Sanders had conceived had isolated ninety-seven long-remembered incidents in the life of Everett Lawrence, yet had hardly scratched the surface.

The first report had been of Lawrence's youthful affair with the girl Diana or Dona. The eighth had been of his failure to pass the entrance examination to the Venusian Nuclear Research Institute; nowhere yet had the machines found traces of what must have been sheer elation at the success of his second attempt. The thirteenth report of what Sanders called his Neurographic Analyzer had concerned Lawrence's fear of heights, an extremely long and complicated report which carried from his earliest youth to late in life, when at last he found relief at the hands of a psychiatrist.

The twenty-second report told in agonizing detail the story of his research and work in developing the Radium Thrust, a report which had its initial signal in the very earliest high-school training of Lawrence, its last on the very eve of his breakdown. He remembered his struggles there well.

The thirty-ninth report was of a nameless fear that his Lawrence-Moroni research would be turned into a weapon of war. From the moment of its first inception, this was clearly a worry complex, but, as far as Sanders and Wyatt and Banks could determine, it seemed to have been well under control, lying dormant.

They thought they had the answer with the fiftieth report. Here was the visualization, again and again, with mounting recurrence, of the world being destroyed in a holocaust of atomic destruction. It was Banks who spotted it as the plot of an unwritten story with which Lawrence had toyed for many years.

"Here we have a man's lifetime," Harry Sanders had said, and the growing pile of reports and charts, of comparative analyses by the three scientists, was the essence, the cream of, that lifetime. The lost loves, the hidden fears, the childhood memories, moral concepts, the political philosophies from one year to the next, all of these which were but a part of Everett Lawrence lay detailed in those scrawled reports.

Gradually the overall picture, punctuated with still unexplored gaps, began to form. Lawrence, the ascetic child of wealthy parents, who ran away from home at eight to spend two months, suffering, alone, before the police finally

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found him and forced him back to his parents. The frail intellectual who had, for some reason he could never understand, caught the fancy of the most beautiful girl in college, and who had let his opportunity to make her his wife slip forever by. The man attaining physical maturity late, nearly thirty years of age, fighting a tremendous inferiority complex, becoming the most brilliant student ever to attend the Venusian Nuclear Research Institute, with his life now devoted totally and completely to science. The aging savant, working night and day with the dying Moroni to complete their formulae for the artificial element delayed stability processes. The scientist, visiting his home town on earth, seeing for a fleeting instant the girl he had lost in college, and unable to remember her name. The old scientist, deeply afraid but working grimly on the miserable, cold and forbidding tininess of Ceres. . . .

"Working on an interstellar drive!" exploded Harry Sanders. He jabbed a finger at Banks. "Just like I said, Mortimer. An interstellar drive."

Wyatt, red-eyed and shadow-cheeked, slumped in a creaking chair, feeding duplicate tape onto a reel marked *DUPES—REFERENCE ONLY. DESTROY AT 30.* "All right, prophet, congratulations. But we *still* don't know why he went off the deep end."

"Nor do we seem much closer," muttered Banks, his breath coming in rasping drags. "We've got a pretty detailed picture, Harry, right up to the end—"

"Have we?" Sanders clapped his hand down on the table heavily. "I say we haven't. We're getting tired, and we're being satisfied with over all pictures. I've a theory."

"Look, Harry," said Wyatt tiredly, "we've got almost everything he did or thought during the last week before he collapsed, and we know he was working on an interstellar drive process. We've gotten a glimpse at some of the mathematics and some of the experimental work—"

"None of which we really understand," injected Banks. "I think that's what Harry's driving at."

WYATT pursed his lips, somewhat mollified, and he was silent for a while. Then his eyebrows rolled up. "You suggesting what I'm thinking, Harry?"

Sanders shrugged, and dug with a reamer at the blackened bowl of his pipe. "Maybe. I *would* like to know the significance of that mathematics, in terms of this—" he thumped the pile of reports on Lawrence—"which is what is important for us."

"But to bring somebody else in at this stage of things—" Wyatt objected.

Sanders spread his hands. "It wouldn't be necessary to bring anyone in. We can copy what we see and show it to someone who will understand it. They needn't know how we got it."

"But *who?*" demanded Wyatt. "If this stuff is so all-fired far afield from everyday physical research, who—"

"Who's running the show on Ceres, with Lawrence out?"

"Huh? Why, Popkoff, I think."

"There's our man."

"Popkoff? He'll—"

"He'll what? Suspect?" Again Sanders shrugged. "Not necessarily. After all, wouldn't it be entirely reasonable for us to get something like that out of Lawrence during the course of an ordinary 'treatment?' Popkoff can certainly tell us what we're after if anyone can, and at the very worst it may help them out there."

The machine hummed, the Animules clattered, the board flashed, the duplicator heaved and squirted out its endless stream of tape. Banks, whose visual receptivity had proven very similar in structure to Lawrence's, prepared the written formulae, the equations, the experimental procedures. Wyatt, by hobby an artist, made sketches of some of the experimental setups.

On all but one equation, the repetition seemed to be normal and not self-reproducing—the result of constant consideration rather than fruitless worry. Simi-

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larly with all but three of the experimental setups. On the one equation and the three experimental procedures, the machines became hysterical and the tape almost came to a halt. Five times for each, Sanders tied down an Animule and put the tape through. Each time the reply was the same.

Eight hours later Harry Sanders, the sketches and equations and a special visa from the Office of Interplanetary Affairs stuffed in his briefcase, was on his way to Ceres in a Three Planets Space Cruiser. Even without seeing Popkoff, he was almost sure he had found the answer. All he lacked was knowledge of the specific significance of his information.

Ninety-two days later, desperately spacesick and thoroughly miserable, Sanders stepped off the *S. S. Australia* and into the pressurized receiving station on Ceres, desolate, without atmosphere of any kind, a thoroughly forbidding rock that might drive any man insane in time. Instantly he realized the magnitude of the Ceres project, for the tiny world was a mass of energy stations, transmutation plants, atomic separation units, and great launching platforms. For a moment it seemed to Sanders as though he had seen it all before, and then he realized he had —on Lawrence's neurograph.

Popkoff was a square-built, long-jawed, smiling man who radiated an intense enthusiasm and whose eyes became moist at the mere mention of Lawrence's name. Sanders gave him the papers and told him that, for the treatment of Lawrence, he must know the significance of the formulae.

It took Popkoff a little less than a terrestrial day—twenty-two hours, to complete his examination. Sanders expressed surprise at his speed, and Popkoff, smiling, said:

"These are very simple formulae, really. Almost any physicist on earth could have done as much for you. I am sorry you had to come out here for virtually nothing."

"This isn't security makes you say that?"

"No." Popkoff smiled and shook his head. "I would tell you if such were the case. These, you see—" he handed Sanders the papers Banks had extracted from the normal pattern—"are as simple and elementary as I have said. Directly from the Lawrence-Moroni theory." Then he handed him the other five reports, the ones on which Sanders' hopes had been pinned. "And these—well, Dr. Sanders, it is a shame, really. A mind like Lawrence's, gone. . . ."

Sanders took the papers, shuffled through them, frowned. "I don't follow you."

Popkoff's head rocked back and his smile became very sad. "They are imaginary. The questions are false. The experiments are make-believe."

EIGHT months after he had left earth, one year after Everett Lawrence had been put into the big bubble in the center of the laboratory, Sanders strode off the *S.S. Australia* at Greater Los Angeles Spaceport. In twenty minutes he was telling Wyatt and Banks, in the privacy of the lab, what Popkoff had told him.

"A long trip, Harry, to draw a blank," said Allan Wyatt. It was a hot day, and the portable air-conditioning unit he had installed in the cramped room was not working. He wiped a river of sweat from his forehead with a disposable kerchief. "A long trip." He tossed the kerchief into the chute, dug in his pocket for another, and began swabbing his neck.

"Not exactly a blank, Allan. Even a negative answer supplies a fact, remember. He unsealed the front of his shirt and wriggled out of that article of clothing. "After all, my friends, the fact remains that this imaginary equation and these experiments were using up a lot of Lawrence's nervous system toward the end. Popkoff's discouragement was based on his assumption that Lawrence had *told* us these things—in other words, that he dreamed them up *after* his breakdown. We know otherwise. *We know that they were present before he went*

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under. God, Allan, can't you get that conditioner working? I'm suffocating."

He went to the window and depressed the opener, holding it down until the window had slid completely into its wall recess. A hot breeze swathed the room. . . .

"Well, before you get all hot and bothered, Harry," growled Wyatt, "we've got news for you."

"Shoot. Bring me up to date."

"We're found out."

"Oh?" Sanders' mind raced through the thousand possibilities, the sudden alteration of circumstances that came into being at that moment. He sat down on a stool. "Well, you weren't really surprised, were you?"

"I guess not. 'Twas Mortimer did the talking for us."

Sanders swung his eyes over to Banks, sagging in the heat. "When and how, Mortimer?"

"About a month after you left. Monmouth cornered me. There wasn't much I could do."

"There wasn't much he could do either, for that matter."

"When he saw Lawrence floating over there," continued Banks, "I thought for a minute I was going to live to be the oldest staff member after all."

"He told the I O A?"

"Naturally." Banks ran his scrawny fingers through his white hair. "Padilla was over here yelling almost before I could tell Allan what happened."

"Know what he said?" laughed Wyatt, still vainly trying to dry his face. "When he saw Lawrence? He said, 'Oh, my!' Just like that—'Oh, my!' "

"Mmm. I rather suspect, then, that I'll be seeing him as soon as he finds out I'm back."

Banks went over to the desk and rifled through some papers, pulling out a thin sheaf covered with his sprawling handwriting, and stapled together. "While you're waiting for the big moment, Harry, read this. It's a pretty thorough description of Lawrence's last coherent hour or so. No abstract thought patterns—just his activities during that brief period. We're running out of repetition patterns, Harry; they've been getting fewer and farther between since you left. I think our answer is somewhere in something we've overlooked." He tapped the papers. "This is my own abstraction from all the reports concerning this period of time. See if you don't think there's a tie-in with what Popkoff told you."

Sanders took the papers and read. . . .

LOOKING out through the glassteel walls of a pressurized enclosure at the desolate surface of Ceres. Jumbled, uneroded, jutting rock, the horizon too close. Large buildings to the left; a larger rocket launching platform. Lawrence holds a piece of paper in his hand, covered with aimless doodling. Popkoff comes down the corridor toward him.

Popkoff says, "Dr. Lawrence, you're late for the conference."

Lawrence replies, "So I am, Popkoff. Sorry. I was just . . . thinking." He glances outside, at the launching platform.

"Thinking, Dr. Lawrence?" says Popkoff.

"Perhaps I'm a bit homesick," is Lawrence's hesitant reply.

Popkoff nods and replies, "This is a hostile place, isn't it?"

Popkoff leads the way into the center of the building. They walk in silence. They clutch the handgrips tightly; there is a light-footed, heady feeling, the effect of the low gravity. The interior of the place is severe and simple; strictly a scientific outpost.

The conference room, not too large a chamber, is packed. Everybody is impatient. There is a bunch of roses in a yellow jar in the center of the big table. This seems in great contrast to the severity that dominates everything else.

Lawrence stares at the cluster of roses.

"More of Reggie's hydroponics," says someone.

Lawrence nods. He picks out one particularly handsome specimen and concentrates on it. It seems almost a fixation . . . .

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Sanders frowned, turned to the next page. Banks and Wyatt read over his shoulder, the older man's eyes squinted in thought, the pudgy physiologist humming hoarsely.

Again the rose. Blurriness. The piece of paper with doodling, and now a formula—an equation, the *equation. Lawrence looks at it.*

Popkoff, frowning, touches Lawrence's elbow. "Whenever you're ready, Dr. Lawrence."

Lawrence raps his knuckles on the table. "The meeting is in session. I believe—am I not right, Popkoff?—I believe the first order of business is Dr. Montaigne's report on the effect of the . . . ah . . . harmonic passage on living creatures."

Montaigne is tall, rawboned, fifty. "I might say this," he commences in a reedy voice, "that our original difficulty, the fact that the passage from what we know as the 'normal' vibration plane into Grant-Lescooley's sub-harmonic plane was killing our test animals, has now been overcome. The new alloy is not crystallizing, and our guinea-pigs are living. However, a rather strange phenomenon has now appeared—the guinea-pigs, however alive they may be, return blind."

The piece of paper with doodling on it, and the *equation. Montaigne's voice fades. The piece of paper dominates everything.*

Lawrence speaks, his voice shaky, "Pardon my interruption, Dr. Montaigne, but I'm afraid I'm not feeling well. I'm sure Dr. Popkoff can handle the meeting—"

Total confusion. The blurred protesting voices. Silence. Lawrence walks down the long corridor, his mind blurred. He goes into his tiny box of a room. There is only a simple bed and a window looking out on that depressing rock of a world. A desk piled high with work. Another piece of paper, on the desk, with the *equation scrawled out in inch-high letters.*

Lawrence sits at the desk, his hand rigid before him. He presses down upon the desk top, his eyes riveted on the piece of paper on which is written the equation. He does not move for a long time. Then he begins to hunt in the litter of papers on the desk.

He produces some drawings—the experimental setups.

He doodles. He rises and goes to the window and stares out. He whirls, almost stumbles over to the desk, begins piling up all the papers and litter on his desk into a number of neat bundles. One at a time, he touches matches to them, and when they have burned shoves the ashes down the waste chute. He goes to the videophone. He lifts the receiver, starts to dial, then changes his mind. He walks to the window, then goes over to the bed and lies down for no more than a moment. He then gets up abruptly and hurries to the door. He hesitates for a moment before going out.

Total confusion. An impression of dizziness, of Lawrence clinging to the handgrips with more force than necessary. He is in the hallway. He hears a scream and does not realize for a second that it is himself.

Again confusion, and then he is back in his room, facing the videophone, shaking all over. He lifts the receiver again, starts to dial, and then freezes. He mutters to himself, and slides to the door as a murky gray visual field superimposes over all.

This is his last coherent impression. . . .

WYATT said softly. "We have a visitor, Harry."

Sanders looked up, put aside Banks' report, and smiled softly. "I didn't even hear you come in, Mr. Padilla," he said quietly. "I was reading something quite fascinating."

"You man imagine, I expect," said Padilla, managing to blend iciness and suavity in his cultured voice, "why I am here."

"I have a good idea." Sanders' smile broadened. "Won't you sit down? I'm afraid these are not the most comfortable surroundings—"

Padilla was eying the big ovoid in

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the center of the room, somewhat as though he expected Lawrence suddenly to leap out at him. "Most weird," he muttered. He swung toward Sanders. "Enough of this banter. I want an explanation."

"Explanation?" Sanders hitched his feet into the rungs of his stool. "There's nothing to explain. We're doing our best to help Dr. Lawrence."

"Dr. Sanders, I am no scientist, I am only an administrator, and I would certainly never try to tell you your business. But *this*, Sanders—I never imagined anything like this."

Sanders lifted a finger, a sort of mother-knows-best gesture. "One moment, Padilla. You're really saying that when everything else failed, *then* you came to me, and somehow expected *me* to succeed, where the others had failed, with the same methods, and the same tools. Come now."

"Nonsense. But this is damned near murder—"

"I assure you not. And if you feel that my remarks were unfair, then how can you object to my using new methods? If you would only admit that the procedure sort of scares you, *that* I could understand."

Padilla bristled; he went over to the plastic egg and put his hands behind his back. "You should have told me what you were going to do."

"Why? So you could have said no? That, of course, being precisely why I did not tell you. We didn't want to miss this golden opportunity."

Padilla swung around. "I don't *like* it, I don't *like* it—"

"Padilla, I guess you and I just can't get along together. As far as I'm concerned, whether you like it or not is of no importance. We have, thanks to an enlightened legislator of some years back, immunity from your interference and from any post-experimental action by you or anyone else. Matter of fact, such immunity you may thank in large part for the long life span which you personally can anticipate. Freeing the scientist from the control of popular and political emotion was one of the most important advances in history, and I don't particularly like the way you're kicking it around."

The O. I. A. Minister was silent for a moment, obviously struggling with himself. "Very well, Sanders. But I warn you, if Lawrence dies—"

"He won't. And if he does, do not forget you have got to prove evil intent, or insufficient knowledge, or untrained hand." Sanders stood up decisively, but his tone was calmer when he began talking again. "As a matter of fact, Padilla, we may have your problem solved shortly."

"Oh?" Padilla's manner changed like a false face torn away. "You mean you have cured Lawrence?"

"Of that—I am certain. Not—yet, but shortly. What I am saying now is that we have found what we think is the key to his breakdown."

"Excellent! Please—what have you learned?"

"Naturally, this will go no further?"

"Certainly not! As far as the rest of the world knows, Lawrence is still at work on the Ceres project. It seems, by the way, that you learned, somehow—"

Sanders laughed. "Let me show you something, Padilla." He led the official across the cluttered floor of the lab, pointed at the neatly arranged reels of narrow transparent tape inside the opened door of the big safe in which they were kept. "On those reels is everything that Everett Lawrence remembered in his lifetime. On them we have soaked up everything out of his brain, and with this machinery here we are analyzing those memories, hunting for the devil that blocked up his mind. When we find it, which we think we have, we're editing it out.

"From those reels, we found out what the Ceres project was, and in the same way we are finding out what made Lawrence tick, what drove him to madness. From what we have learned, I have developed a theory."

"Fascinating, Sanders, truly fascinating." Padilla looked up from the stacks

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of reels with glittering eyes. "What is your theory?"

"I think Lawrence had been approached by somebody or some group—somebody who did not want the project to succeed."

Padilla shook his head sadly. "That seems incredible, in this day and age. "Who on Three Planets . . .?"

Sanders shrugged. "Who can say? But the answer is on that tape. Give us a little while more, Padilla. We'll find it."

AFTER Padilla had left, Banks said, "Harry, what's this business about Lawrence being approached by some hostile group?"

"You were pulling his leg, of course," ventured Wyatt.

"No, I was very serious. This report you worked out, Mortimer—consider that, in the light of what Popkoff said to me on Ceres."

"Mmm," growled Wyatt, "perhaps I see. Suppose someone *did* want the project to fail, and suppose they did get to Lawrence. That's a tough one to take, but assume it—"

"What better way to bring about its failure than by having the works jammed up by faulty research? That equation, for example."

Wyatt demurred. "Yeah, but Harry, even Popkoff spotted it as phony."

"But Popkoff wouldn't see everything that went on. A lesser individual, not familiar in detail with the theories involved, might easily accept anything the head man vouched for."

"But that kind of failure," objected Banks, "would require destruction of the entire project to avoid discovery."

Sanders shrugged, and clapped him heartily on the back. "It's only an idea, Mortimer. Probably wrong. But if it's even close to true, then chances are the pressure on Lawrence came from high up. So the seed is planted." He strode across the room, switched on the Animules, one after another. "C'mon, let's quit talking and get to work. I'll want to see details on the reports the machines have turned in—"

There was no question about it. It was the equation—the nonsense equation that Popkoff had laughed off as the raving of a madman. The equation, and something else, a vivid visualization, indefinable, simply an increasingly active signal on the board. Pinned to it, an Animule discovered a startling fact: The visualization had the same label, deep in the thinking machine's mesonic memory, as Lawrence's exploding world in his unwritten piece of fiction.

"That signal," said Sanders, "appears regularly throughout most of his memories. And then, like that—" he snapped his fingers—"it takes off and becomes a morbid preoccupation. Harmless before, at the end it—"

"At the end it became identified with the other factor, the equation," put in Wyatt.

"The fiction became a possibility, that's all," muttered Banks. "The whole project facing destruction."

Sanders mused for a moment. "You know, the 'who' in this thing, that theoretical personality responsible for all of this—that doesn't seem to have bothered him."

"A matter of viewpoint, maybe, Harry," put in Banks. "Lawrence's life was science. The ignominy of an individual involved in such a thing would probably bother him a hell of a lot less than the scientific indefensible phase."

"But it's that 'who' that is so important," objected Wyatt.

Sanders spread his hands. "Boys, think a minute. If we clear Lawrence's mind of the worry complex that wrecked him, it'll be a lot easier getting the answer to 'who' from Lawrence himself than from hunting through those reels." He grinned and scratched his head. "Boys, let's put Humpty Dumpty together again."

IT WAS kind of like putting Humpty Dumpty back together again, thought Harry Sanders, only in this case you had to unscramble the eggs before putting them back in their shells. The actual

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editing was a simple but somehow terrifying process, even for Sanders; the knowledge that a mistake was irretrievable was almost as intense as the realization that here was a kind of master surgery infinitely more precise and positive in its results than any purely physiological cutting. The possibility that these machines, among the nearest things to perfection created by men, could make a mistake was so remote as to be almost not a factor. Once pinned to the deadly memory pattern's label, the judgment of the Animules was utterly detached, and with electronic primness they identified, tagged, sliced out, spliced, and then went on to the next positive signal. And all in fleeting seconds.

Back and forth the huge reels of tape wound and rewound, and the edited footage began to pile in the waste receptacles. The red lights flashed less and less, the board became almost silent, was silent, the lights ceased, the tape halted, the last of the reels was rewound and filed, the last active Animule disconnected itself, and the soft, unbroken hum of the board announced that the job was done. Nowhere in all the memory patterns of Everett Lawrence was there left a trace of the nonsense equation, nor in his memory of the time since the Ceres project commenced was there a single recurrence of his vision of an exploding world.

The three scientists had watched in silent fascination as the machines did their work. It seemed ridiculous, after all their vast expenditure of time and energy, that the climax of the research should occupy but a few short hours.

Sanders got up after watching the dozing machinery and snapped off the control switch, and the lab was plunged into silence. He reached down into the waste receptacle and pulled out a length of tape.

He grinned, turned to the others. "Well, we did it. Now let's pour it all back in."

Where the removal of Lawrence's memory patterns had taken almost a month, their replacement took less than ten days. The neurones seemed thirsty to lap up everything offered to them; hungry to be impressed.

Working from outside the ovoid, by means of remote control mechanisms, Wyatt sent the contact needles probing into Lawrence's brain, in precisely the same positions from which they had extracted his memory. When he was done, Sanders' machine began its whisper and all they could do was wait.

THE afternoon sun was warm and enervating, and it splashed hotly through the open lab window on the weary form of Mortimer Banks, sprawled in a rickety chair. He looked up as Sanders and Wyatt came in.

"How's our patient?" Sanders demanded.

Banks smiled a kind of triumphant smile, and pointed across the room. "He's awake. And thinking."

Lawrence lay on a cot, staring upward at the ceiling, his facial muscles tense. The first thing Sanders noticed was that his hair was already growing back. He had been out of the ovoid only eighteen hours, and the growth was quite noticeable.

"How do you account for the hair, Mortimer?"

Banks joined them. "Not sure. Probably an unusual reserve of body nutrients available, from being kept in stasis in an ideal condition. His nails, too, if you'll take a look—"

Wyatt said. "Like the dog. Like Sleeper, Harry. For a couple of months his hair and nails grew like the devil."

Lawrence rolled his head so that he could look up at them. He seemed bewildered, and his voice shook a trifle when he spoke. "Sanders?"

Sanders nodded. "We met once. Hulbert, Venus—the Research Convention, about ten years ago."

"Oh—yes. . . ."

"Cigarette?"

"Thanks . . . yes, thanks, that would taste very good, I think. I'm hungry, too. Could something be done about that?"

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"Absolutely." He jabbed Wyatt in the ribs. "Allen, order something from the autoteria." He lit the cigarette for Lawrence, handed it to him.

"I guess you'd like to know where, what and why."

"Kind of." Lawrence puffed nervously on the cigarette. "I cracked up, didn't I?" His eyebrows flicked up questioningly.

"You did. They called us in to help you. You're all right now, though." Sanders dragged a stool over and perched on it. "That was almost eighteen months ago."

The physicist sat up stiffly on the cot. *"Eighteen months!"*

"Just about. Something worried you into a crackup, out on Ceres."

"You know about Ceres?" He fell back onto the cot. "I'm beginning to remember."

"Yes, we know about Ceres. We know a lot of things, about you and your work. Fact is, you made quite a guinea pig, Doctor."

A calmness had settled over Lawrence; the conversation had oriented him a bit, and he accepted the statement without registering more than mild surprise. "Will it hurt to tell me about it?"

"Certainly not. Let me make it plain that you are not a sick man. Lawrence. You're hungry as hell, probably. No doubt you feel stiff and sluggish, but you're as well as you ever were. You see, what made you crack up simply isn't there any more." He described, in some detail, what they had done, but he did not mention the equation or the experimental layouts.

The food came up the autoteria tube, and Lawrence devoured it with wolfish enthusiasm. Sanders watched with unbridled delight. It was the realization of a lifelong scheme—the culmination of his entire career, and he felt very good about it all.

There was a rap on the door. "That'll be Padilla," said Wyatt through a mouthful of sandwich, and he went to open it.

"Padilla?" exclaimed Lawrence, his voice edging sharply. "Why—"

The O. I. A. Minister came striding importantly into the room. "Sanders, Sanders, how can I express our indebtedness to you? To all of you gentlemen, my commendation. And Lawrence!" He advanced to the cot and wrung the physicist's hand. "My dear man, you do not know how glad I am to see you like this again. Back with us at last!"

Lawrence did not smile. "Mr. Padilla, if you knew the horrors I have experienced, you would begin to realize how glad *I* am to be back."

PADILLA swung around to Sanders. "We owe it all to you, sir." He gestured toward Banks and Wyatt, standing to one side with almost identical bemused expressions. "And to you gentlemen." He put a hand on Sanders' shoulder and nudged him to indicate his desire to speak with him out of Lawrence's earshot. "Tell me, Sanders," he said softly, "is he really one-hundred per cent again?"

"In every respect."

Padilla looked at the floor for a moment. "Remarkable. Remarkable." He let his gaze wander about the laboratory, lingering for a while on the empty ovoid in the center. "You know, when I first found out what you were doing—well, I had my doubts."

"I know," grinned Sanders.

Padilla looked at his watch. "I've got to run. I've made arrangements for Dr. Lawrence to stay at the Ministry until he feels able to return to work."

"Fine. I'll have Allan fly him over this afternoon."

Lawrence stared at the door as it slid shut behind Padilla. "Sanders," he muttered, "I've got to tell you something—a lot. I don't know how much information your machine gave you, but you must let me talk."

Sanders sat down on the stool again. "We believe, Lawrence, that somebody was trying to ruin the Ceres project, if that's what you mean." He looked at his fingers, rubbed a spot of dirt on one of

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them. "We also believe, my friend, that you have been approached by this individual—or group, as the case may be." His eyes narrowed keenly and he looked up at Lawrence. "And we think that's what started you on the way out."

Lawrence drew his knees up and crossed his arms upon them. "You're wrong, you know. I won't be offended by the implication of what you say, because I know you say it as a scientist—that it's only an evaluation based on what your machine gave you." He thought for a moment. "You see, you have it completely backwards. The important thing is that the project must *not* succeed."

Sanders hunched forward, a cigarette dangling from his fingers. Wyatt started to eat another sandwich, thought better of it, and came over beside Sanders.

Banks said, "I'd say that tied in with what Harry inferred, Lawrence."

"Sanders, you've got to believe me. Put it this way—I'll let you put me through the mill again to verify it, if you want. You could, couldn't you, if you knew what to look for?"

"I imagine so. Get on with it."

"What would you say if I told you the whole project was a frameup, an immense plot, the heart of a revolt?"

Sanders had forgotten the cigarette. It burned his fingers, and he cursed it briefly. "Go on."

"The ostensible purpose of the Ceres project is to carry through to a conclusion certain research which will result in interstellar travel. Based on the work Moroni and I did on the artificial elements, it tied in with Grant-Lescooley's discovery of a harmonic to the vibration plane in which our observed macrocosm exists. How Padilla ever got hold of Grant-Lescooley is beyond me, but apparently he did. Under the guise of government research, and paid for by the government, Padilla is setting up on Ceres the base for this operation by which he means to take over Three Planets. Most of the men on Ceres, apparently, are with him. A good percentage of the research men, like myself, were innocent of what was really going on—we were called in because we were needed and because we lent prestige and an honest face to the work.

"Sanders, if that research goes through to completion, it will give Padilla access to weapons and powers against which Three Planets wouldn't have a chance. When I found out the real situation, I was thunderstruck. I—"

"How *did* you find out, Lawrence?" asked Wyatt.

"Purely by chance. Somehow, a piece of correspondence to one of the top engineers was delivered to me. It was from Padilla, which I noticed, and so I opened it, and didn't realize until then that it was not directed to me. By that time I had read far enough to grasp—well, everything. The letter concerned the progress we were making, and made reference to a 'group on Mars' which was 'very nearly ready' plus other details. I resealed it, saw to it that it was properly delivered, and nobody ever was aware that I had read it." He paused. "Could I have another of those cigarettes, Sanders? Thanks." He inhaled deeply. "I knew I couldn't go to the government—Padilla is too strongly entrenched, too widely respected, and in any event he was in a position to stop me cold, no matter what I attempted. I realized that there was only one way to make sure that the project failed—" his face darkened, and he looked in shocked surprise at the three scientists. "Do you know, that's all I remember? From there on it's a blank. Now, isn't that a hell of a thing."

Sanders rose slowly and began to pace the room. The sun had set and it was very dark in the room; none of them was particularly aware of it. It was Banks who broke the strained silence.

"Harry, it's obvious as all blazes."

"Yes, Mortimer, of course. You used the word 'failed,' Lawrence. You said 'only one way to make sure the project failed.' That ties in with what we know—ties in perfectly."

He sat down again beside Lawrence. "Listen, my friend. I'm not going to let Padilla get hold of you, that's for sure. He knows more about you than you

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think—he knows that we learned a good deal about you from our research. That'll be enough to make your removal vital to his plans. You see, his original reason for having you cured was a fear that you had discovered something dangerous in the research itself, something that was too much for you to take. He had no idea that it was knowledge of his scheme that bounced you—not until we suggested that you had been approached by someone who wanted the project to fail. Then he must have realized that you had found out, or were at least suspicious. His interest in coming here today, in letting us continue at all, really, after he found out what was going on, was to determine whether or not we had really succeeded in restoring your sanity. If we hadn't, it didn't make any difference; if we had —" He shrugged meaningfully. "At any rate, I suggest you stay with Allan tonight. We'll make further arrangements tomorrow. C'mon, let's get out of here and get a good meal."

"I'm afraid," observed Wyatt ruefully as he hunted for the clothes Lawrence had been wearing when he arrived over a year before, "that you'll find these a little crumpled—"

THE constant, insistent, demanding buzzing of his videoscreen finally brought Harry Sanders out of deep, dreamless sleep. He fumbled for the bed lamp switch, snapped it on and reached over to the screen. He switched on.

He heard Wyatt's shouting voice before the image was clear, either on the screen or in his sleep-blurred eyes. "Harry, get over here right away. They've tried to kill Lawrence!"

He was awake in an instant. "Say that again, Allan."

"For Pete's sake, Harry, move!" There was a trickle of blood running down the left side of his face, and his forehead was bruised. "Lawrence is dying!"

Sanders moved. He clicked off, swung out of the bed, and ran across the room to the refresher, putting on his clothes as he did so. He stuck his head in the refresher for a couple of seconds, felt a blessed clearing of his still rocky brain and dashed out of the apartment and into the garage below. It took him five precious minutes to get his aircar started and maneuvered out the tightly packed—at that hour of the night—parking area, but after that it was but a few moments across the old Hollywood area to Wyatt's apartment building.

There was a crowd gathered when he arrived, and he had trouble finding a landing area, and after that an even tougher time fighting his way to the front of the swarm of people. An Emergency Squadman tried to halt him at that point, but a kick in the stomach and a sharp blow to the man's face was sufficient to give him time to get into the sprawling two-story structure.

He caught the distinct aroma of ozone as he ran down the hallway, and knew immediately that someone had used a parabomb. The odor became painfully sharp as he approached the knot of Emergency Squadmen guarding the door —which he could see was splintered as though pushed outward by a violent force—to Wyatt's quarters. He talked his way into the apartment, a Squadman on either arm.

The apartment was a shambles. The walls were baked as though by fire. There was a great, irregular, star-shaped sear on the floor, and the whole wall dividing the living room from the bedroom had been blasted out, exposing to view the complete destruction which had ripped that room from end to end.

Wyatt sat on the floor, holding a torn cloth to his bleeding face. He was talking to a Squadman when Sanders entered, and when he saw his partner he called out shrilly:

"The bedroom, Harry! Lawrence! Maybe he's still—"

Sanders broke free of the grasp of his guards and climbed over the wreckage and into the ruined bedroom. He found Lawrence sprawled between the pieces of what had once been a bed, and the charred but unshattered far wall. The physicist's eyes were open, and he was

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indeed alive.

"Lawrence, in the name of God, Lawrence. . . ."

Lawrence shuddered. "They . . . outguessed us, Sanders. Hell of a thing, to go to all that bother with me . . . and then this. . . ."

Sanders' eyes took in the injuries he had been dealt, as he spoke. It looked as though the full force of the explosion had hit him in the stomach; his body had been ripped open, shattering his ribs, and a throbbing trickle of blood came from his mouth. Of a sudden Sanders felt angry as he had never felt angry before in his life: What idiot would do a thing like this, in this society, this supposedly sane and civilized society? He thought they had bred avarice out of men, but he guessed that was still a dream.

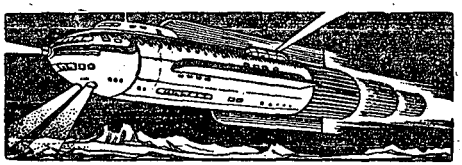
"Sanders," muttered Lawrence, "Sanders, I figured something out tonight, before . . . this. I could have . . . wrecked Padilla for sure. If I could have gotten back to Ceres . . . I figured out a phony research experiment that would have . . .." he coughed blood. "That would have looked okay to the lower bracket men . . . would have blown Ceres . . . and Padilla's plans to hell. . . ."

Sanders looked up as a Squadman, a doctor's bag in his hand and a surgeon's red band on his arm, knelt over Lawrence's twisted body. "Poor devil. I'll administer some opiates. It'll make it easier." He prepared a needle, filled it from a phial of clear liquid. Sanders watched with sad eyes.

Lawrence was laughing, in a terrible, pain-wracked way. "Sanders," he muttered, "the funny thing is . . . I remembered this tonight, after I figured the other out . . . the funny thing is, I *know* I planted that phony setup . . . I don't remember *doing* it, but I know I did . . . all they've got to do is pick up . . . where they stopped when I cracked . . . up. . . ."

Which they will, now, thought Sanders as he stood up. Lawrence slept under the opiate, dying painlessly. Sanders went into the other room to help Wyatt.

Which we will, now.



SPACE-CREW CANDIDATES APPLY HERE!

SCIENTISTS estimate that only 5 out of each 1000 candidates will be chosen for the space travelers of the future. The ideal spaceman will be between 28 and 35 years old, of medium height and build, and as physically, mentally and psychologically sound as exhaustive tests can determine. The requirements for women spacecrew members—radio and radar operators, record-keepers, etc.—will run about the same as those for men except that they may be shorter and lighter. Heart, lungs, brain, skin and internal temperature, blood oxygen content, pressure and circulation will be minutely studied by means of cardiographs, X-ray cameras and complex electronic devices.

Ability to handle the body efficiently in a weightless condition will be an important factor in selecting candidates; therefore it is believed that champion pole-vaulters and divers will fill the bill best. With this specialized type of athletic experience behind them, divers and pole-vaulters—theoretically, at least—should have little difficulty in adjusting themselves to the weird sensations waiting for them in outer space where all objects are weightless. But—warn the scientists—even divers and pole-vaulters will have to learn bodily coordination all over again once the first space ship passes beyond the field of Earth's gravitational pull.

—Norman B. Wiltsey

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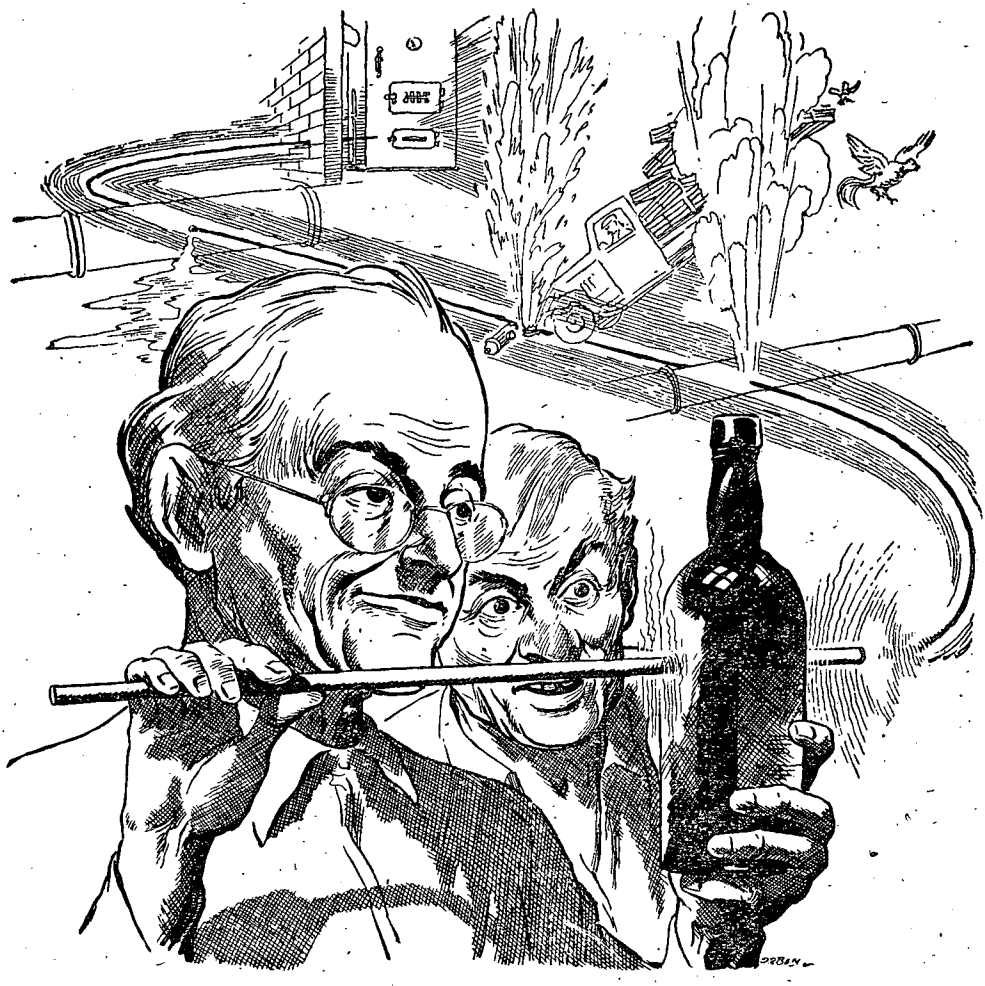

The Jezebel

By MURRAY LEINSTER

WE COULD all feel a great deal safer if Mr. Thaddeus Binder were a little more ambitious, or a little less successful, or if, perhaps, his dearest friend Mr. Madden had caught him when he went after him with a stick of driftwood. Unfortunately, in his retirement on pension from the electric-light-and-power company, he does research. He reads Aristotle, Poincaré, Ron

You would never have believed that nothing could make so much trouble

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Hubbard and Paracelsus. He gets ideas from them and tries them out. And we'd be safer if he made atom bombs in his kitchen laboratory. One of them might go off. That would simply be that. As it is—

He investigated the idea of compenetration, once. That is the philosophical notion that two things can occupy the same space at the same time, and it sounds harmless. But when Mr. Binder got through with it, not only himself but seventy-one other persons had been heaved violently into what can only be described as the middle of the week after next. In the process they lost their small change, their zippers, the nails out of their shoes and the fillings out of their teeth. They were also unpleasantly surprised.

That was mild, of course, but it's the suspense that hurts. Nobody can guess what Mr. Binder will accomplish next. Even his best friend, Mr. Madden, has grown suspicious. The other day Mr. Madden went to call on him. Mr. Madden is also retired, from the career of skipper of a charter-boat for fishing parties. His son runs the ancient fishing-boat now, and Mr. Madden disapproves. But the other day he went to Mr. Binder's house and rang the doorbell. Mr. Binder answered it.

"Why, George!" he said cordially, at sight of Mr. Madden's sunburned jowls. "George! Come in! I've got something to show you!"

"Hold it!" said Mr. Madden sternly. "I've troubles and I need consolation, but not one step do I come into your house if you've notions of showing me your scientific triumphs!"

"It's not a triumph," protested Mr. Binder. "It's a failure. It's only something I worked out from soap-bubbles."

Mr. Madden considered, then yielded.

"If it's only soap-bubbles," he conceded suspiciously, "it could be harmless. But I've got troubles. I've no mind to have them increased. Nothing controversial, now! I'm allergic to it!"

He stamped inside. Mr. Binder led the way happily to his kitchen. There were curtains at the windows, from the time before he was a widower. An icebox whirred merrily by one wall. But beside another wall stood a work-bench and the chairs held burdens of coiled wires and tin cans full of rusty bolts, and there were mysterious substances in screw-top jars that once had held preserves. Mr. Binder cleared a chair by removing a bread-board, hand-drill and a cup and saucer with coffee in it.

"You'll be amused," said Mr. Binder ingratiatingly. "I got interested in soap-bubbles, and that led to surface tension, and that led to—well, George—I made something that you might as well call a vacuum. But it's a new kind of vacuum. It's solid."

Mr. Madden sat, four-square and with his knees apart.

"Well, now," he admitted, "that might not upset me. They use vacuums in electric bulbs and such. There's vacuum cleaners, though why anybody should worry about a dirty vacuum—"

Mr. Binder laughed delightedly. Mr. Madden thawed at this appreciation of impromptu wit. But he said mournfully:

"I've troubles on my mind, That boy of mine, running the old *Jezebel* that I took fishing-parties out in for twenty years. I shouldn't ha' turned her over to him. He's got her up on a marine railway. A railway, understand! And he says she has to have a new engine. She's too slow, he says! Fishin'-parties don't want speed. They want fish!"

MR. BINDER offered hospitality. He turned up the gas under a kettle on the gas stove. He put honey, cinnamon, nutmeg and a lavish slab of butter into a glass. He judgematically poured a huge hooker of brown liquid over it from a black bottle. He filled the glass with hot water, stirred it, and presented the result to Mr. Madden. Mr. Madden regarded it with lessened sternness. He took off his hat and coat, loosened his suspenders and relaxed the waistband of his trousers. He took the glass.

"The old demon rum himself," he said tolerantly. "You've bribed me to listen to you. All right, I'll listen. After, I'll tell you about my boy wantin' to put

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twelve hundred dollars in a new second-hand engine for the *Jezebel*. It's outrageous!"

Mr. Binder beamed. He went to his work-bench. He loosened the vise and removed a six-inch piece of wooden rod which had been held fast in it. One end of the rod glistened faintly. He showed it to Mr. Madden.

"You'd never guess it, George," he said happily, "but that's practically a vaccum on the end of this stick. Feel the wind!"

He held it close to Mr. Madden's weathered cheek. There was a distinct brisk wind blowing sidewise from the cut-off end. Mr. Madden raised his hand to take it, and Mr. Binder jerked it away.

"Not yet, George," he said apologetically. "You might get hurt if you don't understand it first."

"Then put it away," said Mr. Madden heavily. "I'll drink this drink and be gone. It's controversial!"

He sipped, shaking his head. Mr. Binder protested:

"Look, George! Like this!"

He picked up the breadboard. He presented the shiny end of the stick to it. There was a slight burping noise. There was a slight misty appearance. The wooden rod went through the breadboard. Mr. Binder withdrew it, and there was a neat hole there. Mr. Madden's jaw dropped. Mr. Madden picked up a section of sheet-iron. The noise was rather more like a hiccough than a burp. The wooden rod went through, leaving a hole. Mr. Binder picked up an empty bottle. The wooden rod cherruped. It made a hole in the glass bottle. There was again a misty appearance.

"Well, now!" said Mr. Madden, intrigued. "That's a fancy drill you've got there! What does the cutting?"

"What I call the vacuum," said Mr. Binder modestly. "It's really something that's got surface tension so high that it won't let anything touch it. Anything that comes in contact with it, it throws away. Sideways. Even air! That's why I call it a vacuum."

"Vacuum is as vacuum does," said Mr. Madden sententiously. "What're you going to do with it?"

"I can't do anything with it," said Mr. Binder regretfully.

"Hm, now!" said Mr. Madden. "It'd ought to be good for something!"

"It's just painted on the end of the stick," said Mr. Binder. "It's very easy to make. I did think I'd give it to the government for the boys in Korea. For bullet-proof clothes, you know. It can be painted on cloth."

Mr. Madden blinked.

"Bullet-proof clothes," he asked. "To put on a bayonet, now—"

Mr. Binder said regretfully:

"Make believe this is a bullet." He picked up a spanner and swatted the end of the wooden-stick. There was a noise. There was a darkish mist in the air. But the spanner didn't hit the stick. The stick went through the spanner. There was a hole. "If a bullet hits a piece of cloth with this solid vacuum on it, the bullet gets thrown away sidewise in powder. This solid vacuum don't like anything! A man with clothes on that were solid vacuum outside—you could turn a machine-gun on him, or shoot at him with a cannon, and nothing could get through to him."

"Ah!" said Mr. Madden with approval. "That's a fine, patriotic invention. What did the government say?"

"No use showing it," said Mr. Binder regretfully. "A man in a solid-vacuum suit couldn't sit down."

Mr. Madden looked his question. Mr. Binder pointed to the shiny end of the stick.

"This's the seat of his pants," he said. He touched the suppositious seat of somebody's pants to the seat of a kitchen chair. It went through. There was a hole.

"Hm," said Mr. Madden gravely. "They'd have to sit on the floor."

FOR answer, Mr. Madden touched the shiny stuff to the floor. It went through. He said, still bent over:

"I haven't the nerve to let go of it. It ought to go on down to the center of the earth. I'm guessing it would."

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He straightened up and put the stick back in the vise.

"I thought you'd be interested, George. Now, what's your trouble?"

Mr. Madden waved away the question. He was envisioning somebody wearing a suit like the shiny stuff on the end of the stick and who had sat down. Mr. Madden saw that he would go tumbling down through solid earth and rock, on downward indefinitely. There appeared to be drawbacks to solid vacuum as wearing apparel. But then he slapped his hand on his knee.

"Give him," he said authoritatively, "a ordinary seat to his pants. That's it! A man ain't often wounded just there, anyways."

But Mr. Madden shook his head and sighed.

"No. But he might stub his toe. If he fell flat on his face, it'd be just as bad as if he sat on his—in the usual way, George. And when fighting, a man might get careless and not watch where he walked."

"That's so," conceded Mr. Madden.

He sipped at his drink. Mr. Binder said, with a gesture toward the wooden rod in the vise:

"You noticed I didn't dare put it down? There's a vacuum in front. It's always trying to get pulled into that vacuum. Only of course it couldn't be. If I pointed it up at the sky and let go, it'd go shooting off I don't know where. Straight up. Pulled by the vacuum. What's your trouble, George?"

Mr. Madden cleared his throat. He did have troubles. But Mr. Binder had proposed a problem, and Mr. Madden was not one to let an intellectual riddle go unsolved. He held up his hand.

"It's obvious," he said sternly. "Why didn't you realize it? You can paint that stuff on cloth. Take an umbrella and paint it with solid vacuum. Then you hold on to the handle and open the umbrella. You'll fly. Close the umbrella, and you'll come down. Just like that!"

But Mr. Binder shook his head yet again.

"Sometimes an airplane gets turned upside down," he said sagely. "It often happens. And if it hit the ground upside down—besides, George, where could you hang up an umbrella like that?"

Mr. Madden's glass was empty. Mr. Binder took it. Again he compounded honey, nutmeg, cinnamon and butter with hot water and a fluid from a black bottle. But as the butter melted he went back to the vise.

THIS time he took out the stick and dipped its shiny end into the two glasses. The effect was remarkable. For an instant it could be seen that the melted butter, attempting to touch the end of the stick, was thrown violently away sidewise in an infinitely thin sheet. It was actually only molecules thick. In consequence the butter-globules were broken into tiny droplets below microscopic size. The drink was stirred as no other drink was ever stirred before. It was literally homogenized. It was out of this world.

Mr. Binder returned the rod to the vise as Mr. Madden sampled it.

"Smooth!" said Mr. Madden in reverent astonishment. "Never was there such smoothness in human history! You're a rich man, Thaddeus! There's not a bar in the world won't buy batteries of these for mixers! Not a bar!"

"No," said Mr. Binder depressedly, as he sipped at his own glass. "If a bartender tried to clean one of these it would be too bad. If he dipped it too low it would powder the bottom of the glass and stir it in the drink, or go right through the bottom. No, George, it's just one of those inventions that's a good idea, but impractical!" And then he sighed and said encouragingly. "What's on your mind, George? You said you had some troubles."

Mr. Madden sighed in his turn.

"It's that boy of mine," he said pathetically. "He's got the old *Jezebel* up on a marine railway, and he says she's got to have a new engine. And there's been nothing the matter with that engine the past fifteen years. Twelve hundred dollars he wants to spend! Just to take people out to the fishing-grounds faster! And I've got to take the money out of

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the bank for him to waste on engines!"

Mr. Binder said "Tsk-tsk." He listened while Mr. Madden unburdened his soul. He mixed another hot buttered rum. He listened further to Mr. Madden's troubles. That is what a friend is for. Mr. Binder, being a friendly soul, gave Mr. Madden what comfort he could, but Mr. Madden was weeping for his twelve hundred bucks, and he could not be comforted.

At long last Mr. Binder said hesitantly:

"George, there's something I could suggest. If this solid vacuum of mine could be made into uniforms for the boys in Korea, it'd be a military secret. But it can't. And it isn't practical for airplanes or drink-mixers. But it is a good vacuum. I could put some of it on the bow of the *Jezebel*. It'd try to pull the boat along. It might make her go faster, and I'm sure it'd save gasoline."

Mr. Madden blinked. Mr. Binder went on meditatively:

"And it ought to be safe. You don't run into things with boats, like cars. And this'd be just on the bow, and the boat'd be kept balanced by the rest of it, so it wouldn't start for the sky. And boats don't turn over—only sailboats—and moreover, I could put it on canvas, instead of the planks, so we could always take it off. Suppose I try it, George?"

Mr. Madden had been depressed on his arrival, but he was now uplifted. He had been suspicious, but he was now soothed. And he had been cagey, but this might save him some money.

They drove away from Mr. Binder's house in a taxi, with the materials for the application of solid vacuum to a charter-boat's bow in two paint-cans between their feet. And Mr. Madden was so moved with joy that he hummed melodiously as they rode. He had insisted on bringing the wooden rod as a sample of what was to be accomplished with the *Jezebel*. He beat time with it to his own melody as he rode.

"Now, George," said Mr. Binder, "you mustn't get your heart set on this! We can try, but there are lots of disappointments in this world. Maybe there's something we haven't thought of—"

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Madden exuberantly. "I'll own that it's a surprise to find that one of my own friends is a genius, but I shoulda known it! I wouldn't be surprised if the *Jezebel* hits ten knots with your stuff on her bow! Paint it right on, eh!"

"I'd better not," said Mr. Binder. "We might want to take it off again."

"Perish the thought!" said Mr. Madden. "The idea's revolting. With a good solid vacuum at her bow, the old *Jezebel* will be good as new and maybe more saving in gasoline besides!"

Their taxi darted past a station-wagon with a trick exhaust. The trick was to carry it up above the roof in a pipe, and let it loose in mid-air, where more people could smell it. Some of the fumes came in the taxi window. Mr. Madden began to cough. Mr. Binder thumped him encouragingly on the back. Mr. Madden dropped the wooden stick with the shiny end. He didn't notice. Mr. Binder didn't notice either.

BUT the rod tumbled to the floor, point-down. It burped slightly, and went through. It tumbled to the ground. Again it landed solid-vacuum-end down. It hiccoughed as it penetrated the asphalt. Gummy stuff like asphalt is more resistant to surface-tension—or vacuum—than more brittle materials. But the wooden rod vanished beneath the surface, leaving a neat small hole. It made a humming sound as it went through the macadam underlay of the asphalt. It sang happily as it went busily down through some four feet of packed clay to a steel pipe buried there. The pipe happened to be a high-pressure natural-gas line. The solid vacuum cherruped and went into it. Natural gas from the heart of Texas awaited it. The pressure didn't push the wooden rod out again. Naturally. It couldn't. The end of the rod was vacuum. So the rod went into the gas-line, and then there was a geyser-like roar. Gas at fourteen hundred pounds to the square inch began to bellow up through the hole the pipe had

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left behind it. It erupted into the street, carrying sand, clay, macadam rocks and finally the asphalt. In seconds there was a hole a foot in diameter, and growing bigger. But it actually developed under an ancient motor-truck carrying chickens in wooden crates. There was a racket as the stones pelted the bottom of the truck. The truck, insulted, backfired thunderously.

It rose off its hind wheels and darted ahead like an ancient female plucking up her skirts to flee a mouse. But it was not exactly a mouse from which it fled. The backfire had ignited the escaping gas. A lovely column of flame leaped skyward, howling. The driver of the truck cast a panic-stricken glance behind, burst into tears, and drove his truck into a fire-hydrant. It crashed. All the wooden cages broke and chickens spread their wings and flew frantically to and fro, while from the broken hydrant a charming fountain of water poured upward in the previously unembellished street.

But there was more. The little wooden rod went on. The surging gas tilted its back end, so that it went out of the gas-pipe on a slant. Two feet further on it struck a water-main and went blithely into it. Again its relative streamlining took effect. It swung about and went streaking along the pipe, in the water. As it went, it flung water laterally from its solid-vacuum front. Violently. It amounted to a traveling increase of pressure. The water-main cracked. The rod sped busily. The water-main opened along its length, poured water into the soil under the paving, searched for and found entry-ways into cellars, and the pavement swelled and rose while cellars received floods of pure cool water.

The rod went on again. There was a bend in the pipe, which it ignored. It buzzed its way out into yellow clay once more, found a conduit carrying telephone and fire-alarm signal lines, and made musical sounds as it cut through. It was followed by water fascinatedly trailing it to see what it would do. All the fire-alarms in the city rang furiously all at once. All the telephones went out of operation. The rod went buzzing on, found a concrete cellar-wall, buzzed through it, leaped into mid-air from sheer high spirits, and landed vacuum-point-down on the high-pressure boiler of an electric power-plant.

When it went out the bottom of the boiler, however, it emerged into the fire-box. And here its career ended, because while what Mr. Binder called a solid vacuum could take care of any solid or mineral it might come upon, it couldn't do anything about heat. The eighteen hundred degrees of the firebox destroyed the solid vacuum at its point, and it was merely a little stick of wood when the water poured down out of the boiler to put out the furnace.

These events followed each other briskly. Still, it was a good thirty seconds between the time Mr. Madden strangled on exhaust-fumes and the roar of steam from the power-house. In that interval the taxi turned a corner and Mr. Binder and Mr. Madden went on oblivious to it all. In fact, when Mr. Madden stopped coughing and Mr. Binder stopped pounding his back, Mr. Madden said sentimentally:

"Y'know, the more I think about it, the gladder I am that I've got a friend like Thaddeus Binder."

Little did he know.

MR. BINDER painted the first of the two coats on an old sail stretched about the *Jezebel's* bow. When that had dried, he would swab it over with a particular reagent, and the sail would be coated with solid vacuum. The *Jezebel* was an ancient, stubby craft some forty feet long and something over twelve feet wide. She rested rakishly, stern to shoreward, on a cradle on a marine railway. About her there lay a thick aroma of oakum, paint, discarded bait, salt-water mud and general effluvium. She fitted her background. The canvas about her bow looked like an untidy diaper, and it was held in place by stout roofing nails. Mr. Binder carefully refrained from preparing his solid-vacuum surface all the way back to the nails, in case he needed to take the canvas off again. Mr. Madden sat on her deck underneath the

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awning-frame. Maybe he thought sentimental thoughts about how many lunches he had sold in advance to intending passengers at seventy-five cents a lunch, and then had maneuvered the *Jezebel* so they'd all be too seasick to eat anything.

Mr. Binder tested the first coat of his infinite-surface-tension solid-vacuum material. He swabbed it over with the reagent. He climbed a ladder leaning against the *Jezebel's* hull. Mr. Madden greeted him blithely.

"Well, can we try it now?"

Mr. Binder went forward and held his hand over the rail. He felt a distinct breeze blowing upward—air hurled sideways by the solid-vacuum coating just completed. If he'd put his hand astern from the side coating, he'd have found air blowing astern, or if he'd put his hand underneath the bottom of the solid vacuum he'd have felt wind there too. The stuff wasn't particular which way it heaved things. It just heaved them sideways to avoid their contaminating touch. This went even for air. It should go also for water. Mr. Binder went astern and nodded.

"I think it'll be all right to try now, George," he agreed.

Mr. Binder went ashore. To the office of the marine railway. He arranged for the cradle bearing the *Jezebel* to be lowered gently until the bow of the boat barely rested in the water. He climbed to the deck again. With a certain humor he went into the pilot-house, sticking up like a sore thumb astern, and waved instructions.

The person in charge of the winch that hauled the cradle negligently reached down and lifted over the ratchet of the winch. The winch thereupon turned deliberately and whacked him in the solar plexus with a capstan-bar. He sat down, gasping. The *Jezebel* trundled down the inclined way toward the water.

"Hold it!" roared Mr. Madden. "Slow, now! Easy!"

The *Jezebel* went rolling faster. Mr. Madden bellowed instructions. They were wholly futile. *Jezebel* and all, the cradle splashed into the water. Wavelets reached up with a pretty eagerness to play tag with the charter-boat's bow.

When water tried to touch the canvas-covered bow, it was flung violently aside. It went in all directions in a thin, glistening, high-velocity sheet. When the *Jezebel* hit water, an appearance set up about her front parts which looked singularly like a liquid pinwheel twenty feet high. That was water getting away from before the boat, and leaving a vacuum there. Nature abhors a vacuum. So did the *Jezebel*. She tried to move into the vacuum and to fill it. The vacuum moved on before. The *Jezebel* hastened, flinging water higher and wider in her haste. The vacuum moved still faster, being fastened to her.

The *Jezebel* went out of the slip leading to the railway, exactly like a bat out of hell.

SHE had never made more than a groaning eight knots in all her existence, before, because her bow was bluff and clumsy and plenty of power was needed to overcome its resistance. It offered no resistance now. There was nothing ahead of it. She was making thirty-seven knots when she got out of the slip and headed for a sand-barge in tranquil passage to some unknown destination. When Mr. Madden in the pilot-house reacted from the straight paralysis of terror upon him, he swung the wheel, but fast. The *Jezebel* swung—heeling dangerously—and missed the sand-barge by six inches. She started down the harbor to pick up some speed.

At the very beginning, when she was going under fifty knots, she looked rather like a fireboat with all hoses working. But of course fireboats don't usually travel quite that fast. Somewhere between fifty and sixty knots, the *Jezebel* began to look more impressive. Spume and spray flung from her bows rose to a height of sixty feet or better—the height of a six-story building—and spread out on either hand. And there was plenty of water hitting her bows now, and every drop of it went somewhere. Some doubtless spurted down toward the bottom of the harbor. Some of it flowed astern. But an awful lot went into the air. There

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was something like six thousand tons of water thrown up to become air-borne spray for every mile she traveled. And did she travel!

A quarter-mile from the sand-barge she was doing eighty knots. That was when she hit the Sunday-school picnic. The picnic was mounted on a large, ancient, paddle-wheel steamer, and everybody was going about looking benevolent, except the small boys who had sneaked out of sight and were fighting underneath the lifeboats and drawing pictures on white-painted surfaces.

From nowhere, but very swiftly, there loomed up a cylinder of flowing water, half a block wide and six stories high. It rushed upon and engulfed the Sunday-school picnic. Roaring waters swept the steamer. The roaring passed by, leaving the steamer rocking helplessly in a thick and blinding mist. Everybody who had been looking benevolent was soaked. Some of them even said naughty words. The steamer rocked so violently that little girls got seasick in all directions. The only persons on the steamer not thoroughly wetted and miserable and frightened were the little boys who had been fighting under the lifeboats.

This was an exterior picture of the *Jezebel's* accomplishment during the first few seconds of activity. In the *Jezebel's* pilot-house, nothing whatever was to be seen. She was surrounded by walls of rushing water. Rising water, thrown away sidewise by the solid vacuum at her bows. And the rising streams moved at such high velocity that they broke into tiny and ever tinier droplets and tiniest particles, until they were so small that they did not fall again. They were fog-particles. They floated in the air like the world-famous mists of Niagara.

But the *Jezebel* was blinded. She was invisible. A monstrous half-cylinder of vapor raced across the harbor, and it engulfed this ship and that, and no man knew what it could be, but all men feared it. Within the column—right behind that startling tumult like the snout of a terrified sea serpent—Mr. Madden uttered stricken cries and wrestled with the *Jezebel's* wheel.

THERE was a tug towing a long line of log-rafts down toward the sea. The lightning-like rush of white vapor roared upon the rafts. The *Jezebel* hit them. Her bows growled. The wooden rod had burped politely on hitting wood. The solid vacuum before the *Jezebel* made a deep-bass note as it flung aside the separate particles of log that tried to reach physical contact with it. The tug sped on, its foremost raft sliced through in the mist.

The straight line of the *Jezebel's* progress broke, as she was heading for a wharf. Mr. Madden clawed her around, and she heeled and made a ten-foot wave to go on and make trouble where it hit. She rushed toward an anchored tramp, and actually did pass under the overhang of its stern, and she pushed the tramp's bows under-water by the violence of her upward thrust. She swerved again as Mr. Madden turned her wheel at frantic random. She was throwing water upward at the rate of hundreds of tons per second, and she ran across the bow of a ferry-boat and drowned its fires and more than half-drowned its passengers.

"Turn it off!" howled Mr. Madden. "Turn it off! We got to turn it off!"

They were isolated from all of mankind in a universe of white mist. Mr. Binder said: "We can't."

Then the world went black about them. It was not that they were unconscious. It was that the *Jezebel* had gotten into the shallow water near shore alongside the more elegant and expensive shore-road section of the city. She was plowing through three feet of black mud. But it offered no hindrance to her passage. She threw it away with a continuous gesture. The *Jezebel* hit ninety knots traveling through mud some fifteen yards from shore. She heaved mud up; it floated magnificently over the roadside at the water's edge; it coated trees, shrubs, houses, windows, and the elegantly attired strollers on the shore road. And Mr. Madden twisted madly at the wheel and veered out, cut through the stern of a low-lying garbage-scow on its way to sea, and flushed all the

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more malodorous refuse off into the harbor. Then the *Jezebel* streaked for the area thick with maritime traffic.

It should be understood that in all this Mr. Madden was going it blind. He was surrounded by an impenetrable white mist, stories high and half a block thick, which was the equivalent of the thickest fog that ever was on land or sea. He continued to wrench at the steering-wheel and howl for Mr. Binder to turn off the vacuum. Meanwhile the *Jezebel* cut circles and figures-of-eight and other charming arabesque figures in the water. She hit the anchor-chain of a ship loaded with live ammunition for foreign shores. The anchor-chain parted. She swamped a small boat carrying a shore-party ashore from a battle-ship, and swerved into a sand-bar and sent a saffron cloud aloft, and ran under a bridge so close to one of its piers that Mr. Madden saw the mass of masonry at arms' length even through the mist.

The stream of vapor she left behind did not settle. It was too finely divided. It was like that artificial fog which is used in fighting oil-fires. And the *Jezebel* ran crazily here, and there, and everywhere, leaving monster masses of mist behind it, and all harbor traffic ceased to move. Ships cast anchor and unlimbered foghorns. Tubs blew whistles. Smaller craft rang bells, and bedlam arose upon the face of the waters.

Mr. Binder crawled aft and went into the pilot-house.

"Turn it off!" howled Mr. Madden as the bowsprit of a sailboat at anchor poked into view in the mist, caught in the pilot-house window, and neatly pulled one side of that small structure loose and carried it away astern. "Stop it! Cut it off! Do something!"

The *Jezebel* howled between the sterns of two ships that were drifting together, and steel plates met and crashed over her head. Mr. Madden wrenched at the wheel and wailed: "Sink her! We've got to stop! Sink her!"

Mr. Binder said mildly:

"That's what I came to tell you about, George. She is sinking. I suppose there was a plug left open to drain her when she was up on the railway, and she's filling up." Then he added painfully, "It worries me, George. Because if we jump overboard, going as fast as this, we'll be knocked unconscious and drown. And when she starts to sink she's going to point bow downward, most likely, and head for the center of the earth. And we can't get out."

Mr. Madden opened his mouth. His eyes stared. Then he fainted peaceably.

WHEN he recovered consciousness, there was a great quietude all about. The sun shone brightly. Waves lapped gently somewhere. Birds sang.

He heard a ripping sound. It sounded like somebody tearing more or less rotted canvas. It came again. Mr. Madden realized that the *Jezebel* was perfectly still. She did not rock, she did not have that faintly stirring alive feeling which all boats possess.

Slowly, groggily, incredulously, Mr. Madden staggered to his feet. He did not have to go out the pilot-house door. A wall was missing, providing a more convenient exit.

He stared blankly about him. The *Jezebel* was ashore on a slanting sandy beach. There was no sign of civilization anywhere about save a rusty tin can half-buried in the salty sand. Mr. Madden recognized his whereabouts. This was one of the Beach Islands, forty miles down-coast from the harbor in which the *Jezebel* had broken all records for speed and the creation of tumult.

The ripping of canvas came again. Mr. Madden tottered along the *Jezebel's* deck. He looked over her bow. Mr. Binder stood on the beach, ripping off the canvas that had been coated with solid vacuum. He was handling it very carefully—only from the uncoated side. When he got a good-sized piece of it loose, he struck a match to it. It burned brightly. Mr. Madden smelled rank cloth and burning chemicals. He croaked: "Hey!" Mr. Binder looked up and beamed at him. "Oh. Hello, George. We're all right, you see. When you fainted, George, I took the wheel. It looks like I very fortunately steered right out

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of the harbor and to sea. But when the *Jezebel* slowed down I made out where we were and steered accordingly."

"Slowed down?"

"Yes," said Mr. Binder mildly. "I didn't realize it, but it was very fortunate about the engine. When the *Jezebel* started to sink, the engine made her stern sink deeper than the bow. The bow started to come out of the water. The vacuum was lifted clear. So there wasn't as much of it in the water, and it didn't pull so hard. So we slowed."

Mr. Madden reached out his hand and steadied himself. He felt clammy, from cold sweat. Mr. Binder pulled off some more canvas and burned it. The bow of the *Jezebel* was almost clear of it.

"I headed along the coast," Mr. Binder explained, "until we were slowed away down. Then I headed for shore. We were almost sunk then, and the bow hardly touched water. I hit the beach not going too fast, and we just went up a little way. We'll have to get a tug to pull the *Jezebel* off, but I don't think she's damaged."

Mr. Madden closed his eyes. He was desperately grateful for the fact that he was still alive. But a tug to come forty miles and haul the *Jezebel* off, and go forty miles back again towing it . . . he shuddered.

"I thought I'd better get this canvas off," said Mr. Madden apologetically. "Somebody might come along and touch it, not knowing. But I made an interesting discovery, George! I think it'll please you. I don't think it's quite practical to use my solid vacuum as a way of pulling the *Jezebel* along, but I've got something just as good, for you."

Mr. Madden swept his eyes to heaven. Then he looked dazedly along the beach. He saw a rather heavy stick of driftwood at the edge of the waves.

"I'll tell you," said Mr. Binder interestedly. He held a strip of canvas—coated with solid vacuum—in his hands. He very carefully touched the back, the non-coated part only. He had it doubled so he could hold it. "See?"

Mr. Madden was speechless.

"The solid vacuum," said Mr. Binder, "won't let anything touch it. Friction can only happen when two things touch. And the solid vacuum throws away anything that touches it, but it won't throw away another solid vacuum! Because that can't touch! See? So if I have two solid-vacuum surfaces, George, and I rub them together, I have absolutely frictionless sliding!"

He beamed at Mr. Madden, mistaking Mr. Madden's stare for admiration.

"I'll tell you, George," he said happily. "All the stuff to make solid vacuum is on board. You'll go and get a tug to pull the *Jezebel* off, and pump it out, and plug the hole in it. And while you're gone I'll take the engine apart. And I'll coat the inside of the cylinder and the outside of the pistons with solid vacuum, and I'll coat the bearings and the things that run in them. And then the engine will be absolutely frictionless. You won't need a new one, you'll save money—"

He stopped. Mr. Madden descended with great deliberation from the deck of the stranded *Jezebel* to the sand. He walked away from Mr. Binder. He picked up a heavy stick of driftwood from the edge of the waves. He started back for Mr. Binder swinging it . . .

He didn't catch Mr. Binder. Humanitarianism aside, it may be a pity. We could all feel much safer if he had, or if Mr. Binder were more ambitious or less successful, or something. Because Mr. Binder does research. If he only made atom bombs in his kitchen laboratory, say, it would be an improvement on the present state of things. One of them might go off. But he simply reads Aristotle and Poincaré and Ron Hubbard and Paracelsus and gets ideas from them and tries them out. Right now he is working on the idea that two and two has only been observed to total four, in a long sequence of what may be coincidences. He is investigating the theoretical possibility that two and two might some day produce an atavistic five. It sounds harmless, but nobody can guess what Mr. Binder will accomplish.

It's the suspense that hurts.

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THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 8)

But really, Sam, you didn't have to call us maladjusted, did you? I don't think I am. I get along well with both men (um—yez) and women. I like both sexes. Something wrong with that? Y'know, women lead a hard life. If a gal spends all her time thinking and talking about boys, she's—boy—crazy. If she doesn't, there must be something the matter with her. If the subject of sex bothers her a little, she's frigid. If it doesn't—well, never mind.

But I'm still glad I'm a woman. It can be inconvenient at times, particularly since my interests aren't considered quite normal for a woman. Somewhere along the line, society decided that men could be interested in the scientific and the mechanical. Women should be content to stay at home, cook, keep house, and raise children. Nobody ever thought that maybe somewhere there'd be a woman who wanted to be scientific or mechanical. It's like those science fiction stories you read, where everyone has an assigned task to do, whether he likes it or not.

Don't misunderstand now. I love to cook, and I even enjoy keeping house. I don't even mind changing diapers. But I hate to be told that's all I'm good for.

Oddly enough, women are worse about this than men. Maybe it's sour grapes. Very few of the men I know exchange pitying glances when I mention interest in anything scientific. They don't mind. The women are different. They don't like to see a woman with different interests. They like to feel secure in their little world of female interests.

And that, Sam, is why I organized THE FANETTES. We don't discuss "strategy and the trapping of the elusive male," as you imply. I'd be willing to say that at least ninety per cent of our members joined, not because they are maladjusted, but because they've sense enough to enjoy talking or writing to another female who thinks and feels as they do. After all, society frowns on a married woman who spends all her time in the company of men, and a good many of our members are married.

Now that I've had my say on that, I'll change the subject.

Sorry to see STARTLING going back to a bi-monthly schedule. It's one of my favorites.

To Joe Keogh: You misspelled my name, too. And what was it I said that made you disagree with me? I can't find the mag my letter was in, and I don't remember.

Thanks to all the Fanettes who called Sam names. He's still my favorite editor, though.

And, Sam, in case you're interested the enclosed picture will show you what I look like. It may not be a face to make time stand still, but it's never stopped any clocks, either, and it's even received a few compliments. So there! —*Hq. 521st A.D. Gp., Air Base, Sioux City, Iowa.*

H'mm. In view of the persuasive qualities of the photograph the maid was thoughtful enough to enclose, we manfully choke down all the carefully honed remarks we were saving up—except one. We still think it's too bad a gal who looks like that should waste her time on women. Sorry, men. This pulp paper doesn't reproduce photographs so good.

THE HONEYMOON IS OVER

by Richard E. Geis

Dear Sam: I suspect you wrote that editorial in the June STARTLING in the fond hope of getting someone steamed up. Alright, I'm the somebody, and I'm steamed. One of these days, Sam . . . one of these days . . . POW, right in the kisser!

That small item you found buried casually in the news shoulda been buried with much more care. This learned man from the U. of Ill. is from lower Slobbovia when it comes to the neurotic. This Prof. Mowrer says Frood is wrong. Well, as an ardent Frood believer, I think he's (Mowrer) trying to simplify the neurosis to the point where he can understand it. Too deep for him otherwise.

"Neurosis is not an illness." By that same reasoning psychosis is not an illness either. Or doesn't Mowrer even agree that the difference between neurosis and psychosis is mainly that of degree?

"If you are a neurotic it is because you want to be that way. . . . Neurosis is a pattern of behavior, not an illness." But how do you acquire this behavior pattern in the first place? You think somebody says: "Guess I'll become neurotic today?" And the next thing is a raving neurotic?

The reasons given by Mowrer as the basis for neurosis are all shallow and surfacy. Nothing is said about the basic motivations that decide man's behavior. Nothing is said about what happens when these drives are thwarted. He mumbles about egoboo. Or, rather, he mumbles about egoboo according to you. I have only your words to guide me in this refutation.

Are you responsible for your own character, Sam? Really? You mean to say you pre-

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vented your folks from fighting when you were a young thing in knickers? Or were you so advanced that you took their actions into account and nullified the effect by realizing that they were only parents, after all?

Character is largely shaped, formed, and *SET* by the fifteenth year. I'm talking about BASIC character. Show me a fifteen year old that gives much of a hoot about such things, and I'll show you a prodigy. We're not talking about prodigies, tho . . . just average freshies in high school.

Can you help what happened to you in youth? Can you consciously reach into your mind and set things right? I wish *I* could. The basis of neurosis and psychosis are conflicts between basic instincts or drives and the frustrations of those drives, to greater or lesser degrees, by our modern life, our American culture.

Up with Frood, down with Mowrer. Keep a close watch on Prof. Mowrer, Sam, I'd be interested to know if he felt the publicity and fame were worth the things he did to his standing in the field of Psychology.

Unless MOTH AND RUST is very much better than I think it will be, or very much worse . . . you won't hear from me about it. I expect you've read a ton of raves by now anyway.—*2631 N. Mississippi, Portland, 12, Oregon.*

Can you do something about the complexes handed you in your youth? Why not?

Even Freudians don't say you've got to go down with the ship, flags flying and bands playing. Maybe Freud says you can't do much and Mowrer says you can do a lot. Well, if you don't understand a lot more about yourself at 35 than you do at 15, you're not much of a reasoning, analytical being. To a large extent you can reach into your mind and set things right. Most people's difficulty is that they do not understand what is happening to them or why they are acting the way they are. Read the lovelorn columns in the newspapers sometimes—not for laughs as you have been doing, you creep—but compassionately, to see what jams people get themselves into and how terribly baffled by it all they are.

Sure, maybe Horace gets drunk and beats up his wife because his father refused to let him join the Boy Scouts when he was twelve, but if someone is kind enough to point that out to Horace and let him join the Elves and Leprechauns Marching Society and wear a uniform, he'll get himself drunk and beat up a Leprechaun instead.

Don't laugh, it's a great saving of wear and tear on the wife.

ANOTHER SHIP REPORTS

by H. G. Sample

Dear Sam: I have just finished the April ish of Startling, and darn it, it was good, yes, really good, Sammy you really have sf appeal in this ish that is up to a point and then I read Ethergrams and I boiled, Who in the hell does. L.D. Chandler think he is any way. How can you do it Sam, how can you spoil a swell mag by putting letters in it like the one he submitted. Maybe this won't be printed but I just had to get it off of my chest, and he talks about poor Seibel. As far as I am concerned Seibel is an angel, Oh brother no wonder he gets rejection slips, I'll bet he is a confirmed Batch. If not I take my hat off to his wife, I'll bet she leads a secluded life. Maybe I have been stationed on Okinawa too long, I don't know but I liked that letter from Miss Dickson and I hope that she keeps it up, Me thinks I have heard an eckooo from the past stating that all (What a territory) sf female fens were, How should I put it lets say unattractive, Well I'll bet my next flight to Japan that she will disagree and be able to prove it. Now to something better, that letter of Tom Pace, this kid has made a friend for life, I don't believe that I have ever read anything that was as good, I could rave about it for hours but I won't, all that I will say is Congratts Tom, Well I will close this thing for now and I sure hope that Chandler will stick to his rejection slips and let the rest of us stick to them lil ole gals, And oh yes Sam, thanks to you for a swell Mag.—*NAF NAVY No. 3867, FPO, San Francisco, Calif.*

Seibel an angel?
Pass the Alka-Seltzer.

A TOUCH OF VOLTAIRE

by Bruce Sabsay

Dear Mr. Mines: Many and diversified are the arguments that run through the pages of ETHERGRAMS. Like all good arguments there are plenty of adherents to debate the pros and cons of each vociferously, if not intelligently, as is shown in many cases. Birth control, religion, sex, bems, et cetera, ad infinitum, all have someone to argue for the cause. There is one cause, however, with no answer, no support, and no chance. Being of

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a Voltarian turn of mind, I should like to set my hand to a bit of condemnation of so called intellectual attitudes.

In remarks made at the end of Peggy Lindemann's letter, Mr. Mines, you debunk the good old scapegoats and general punching bags, the American communists. You fail miserably, as do so many others, to differentiate between communists and communism, and in so doing fail again in keeping with the standards of Democracy. Was it not Voltaire, one of the first advocates of freedom, who said, "I may disagree with the man's beliefs, but I will fight to the death for the right to have that man think those beliefs," or words to that effect? UPON THAT THESIS IS BUILT DEMOCRACY!

In allowing the attitude prevalent today to take root, Democracy is stifled, freedom of speech is curtailed, and hysteria is created. Hitler, in his climb to power, used the people of Hebrew faith as scapegoats, and crusaded against communism in the same breath. That was fascism. In that ism Democracy and freedom went by the board. One crime against the people, the pursuit of liberals, progressives, radicals, and other so-called free-thinkers, cannot be used. The simple reason being the lack of necessity for it. Intelligent education of people can do far more good than witch hunts, n'est ce pas?

Science Fiction, its authors, its editors, and its adherents may do well to condemn communism, but when they start to condemn people thinking about a belief, then the bounds of freedom are overstepped. It (StF) is doing, in that case, what many writers foresee in future totalitarianism. What life in a communist oligarchy is like can be expressed adequately only by those who live or suffer in such a society, or by intelligent, farsighted writers extrapolating on FACTS. Another bad attitude is the hounding of intellectuals, Mr. Mines, and you have partially handled that in "we happen to admire intellectuals," a mis-quote, but isn't that the way it should read if completed with "whose efforts are constructive"?

In Miss Lindemann's letter she dwells briefly on the freedom FROM and the freedom TO. Our society is striving to achieve the from. Knocking that freedom can lead to dangerous consequences. Cogitate that, if you will, Miss Lindemann. Also tell me if your "semi-capitalist" society is not a contradiction in terms, Miss Lindemann. How many of our learned men say repeatedly that socialism and capitalism cannot co-exist peacefully, let alone in one society! That certainly does not reconcile your ideal situation. Indeed, many writers have visualized a perfect environment in which all contribute and all benefit, yet the element of human nature arises to shatter the harmony and bliss. With a smattering of capitalism in your perfect society there is more than ever the chance of serious conflict due to the element of free enterprise. Need more be said? Many authors have drawn up a society in which a machine or cybernetic device is used to govern or control. Have any of these brain children been brought to a successful career? No! The human race just does not have, or does not *seem* to have very much belief in itself, outside of some religious ballyhoo, and certainly not in its creations.

In closing, I'd like to pose a question, Mr. Mines. Slavery evolved from barbarism, feudalism from slavery, and capitalism from feudalism. What is next in line?—*901 Bloor St., W., Toronto 4, Can.*

We are misquoted again. We did not say we admire the intellectuals. We did say we admire intelligence. We even pointed out the fact that intelligence is divided into two parts: the learning power and sagacity —or the ability to apply what is learned. We implied that the trouble with many intellectuals lies exactly in that area, that they lack the ability to apply what is learned. And this is precisely the trouble with theoretical communists who distinguish between "ideal" communism and communists. Since the application of any ideal theory can only be done by human beings it is always subject to the failure of human beings. You cannot therefore point to the shortcomings of Stalinism and say "This isn't the way it was supposed to be and this does not therefore invalidate the original theory." It certainly does. Whenever the attempt to apply a theory results in a faulty product the theory has failed to take into account the necessary forces of application.

A final word—you're way off base accusing science fiction readers of limiting freedom of expression. In fact, this is one group of people who are freer from bigotry than any I have ever seen. Stick around.

BACKWARD, O TIME

by Georgina Ellis

Dear Sam: Your editorial in the May issue of SS was very interesting—especially the part about reversing time by surpassing the speed of light. You were wondering what would happen to the men on a faster-than-light ship . . . would they grow young again; and if so, how? Well, they wouldn't grow young *again,* would they? They would be go-

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ing back in time to when they *were* younger . . . they would be young again, but with the same youth they had before. Now suppose that they didn't go back in time and 'youth' too far—only as far as they'd come ahead during their trip. If time started reversing, wouldn't the direction of their ship reverse also? It would progress backwards along its route towards its start as it returned along its 'time-trail'—a trail that it had gone along before reaching the speed of light. Then, eventually, the ship and crew would arrive at the point of departure, having made the trip backwards—in every respect.

The crew would even have talked and thought backwards the words and thoughts that they had spoken and thought on the way out. For if they went backwards in time, the only way that they could go would be along exactly the same route—in time and space—as they had already travelled while going forward.

Then, having arrived home and stopped, the weird reverse effect would have halted. If they were still sane, the crew would be back in the time before the take-off, and would call the whole thing off. But that would be impossible, wouldn't it, because, though they're experiencing it for the second time, this is actually the *first* take-off, so naturally they wouldn't remember having already taken the trip . . . So they'd repeat again and again, forever. I realize that I haven't expressed this very clearly, but I'm sure you get the idea, for what it's worth. Now I'll change the subject before I'm hopelessly confused . . . ! Time travel is all very well in stf stories, but when someone starts talking about it seriously . . . well, I'm lost.

When are you going to get another Kuttner novel like "The Well of the Worlds?" That was beautiful, one of the best stories you've ever printed. There are few writers who can make a story as vivid, and *strange*—otherworldly—as Kuttner.

A thought . . . Barbara Behrman—are you sure you weren't writing that letter about your own efforts . . . ?! Your's was as "snarling, snapping, swaggering, and sometimes sniveling" as any ever printed in the columns! Good for you Sam, you told her off (in a nice way of course! Mustn't lose any sales, must we, eh?).

Wm. Deeck—good grief . . . ! Now I know why my copy of SS was sizzling slightly when I bought it.—*1428 15 Street East, Calgary, Alberta, Can.*

If we follow your argument (and we doubt it) your ship would be going forward and backward simultaneously. This is a little too confusing even for us and we therefore propose to abandon the entire discussion immediately. Any other readers rash enough to tangle with Miss Ellis are welcome. Thanks for homogenizing us.

BESIDE HIMSELF

by A/1c Severin M. Riedl, 13319573

Dear Mr. Mines: Thank goodness I'm conditioned to such stories as THE CONDITIONED CAPTAIN, or I'd have never been able to plod through it so unerringly. I fought it through to the last word, though. If that character Paulsson ever appears in print again, I'll feed him as fuel to a Neptunium motor of my own. I waded through 65 pages and when I finished I thought I heard myself crying, to coin a phrase. The only factor which saved the story was Finlay. His illustrations can't be beat.

Pratt's only claim to fame in ye olde Captain was his use of absolute authority over Democracy (not that it will ever replace a true democracy) but in a functional military organization, such as our friend Paulsson led, it contains the only answer to an efficient and capable striking force. Since authority is the right and power to command, every man cannot have a full measure of it and therefore Democracy must be vetoed. Can you imagine the troops on Old Baldy voting on repelling the next Red attack? There's one authorized leader and he can command counter-attack or withdraw, but the decision is his. 'Course, it's been misused, i.e. Captain Bligh, but even so, most things are. Anyway tell Pratt that his ideas on it were sound, even though he cluttered up what could have been a good novel with giggling psychiatrists, moronic espers, aristocratic Arizins, atomics, supersonics, electronics and hydroponics. Nuff sed.

I got a kick out of the rest of the issue, specially WE BREATHE FOR YOU. It was the backbone of the May offerings. Loomis did a swell job at characterization. I almost knew his people by heart by the time I'd finished. The other stories fattened the 25c investment, so all in all there are no complaints on the whole issue except for the above gripes. They say if you don't gripe you aren't happy. Sorry I appear to be overjoyed.

I'm stationed on an isolated radar site, a goodly distance from the U.S.A. and have the duty as an electronics (radar) technician. The work keeps me busy, but the off-time runs the gamut from tedium to apathy, with a lull now and then for monotony, so I appeal, via your fine mag, to the readers for some SF reading material. Don't throw away last month's STARTLING. We won't get it up here for three months. PUL-EEZE send on any and all old copies and I'll see to it they get in the squadron library—honest.—

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We predict freely (no charge) that your days of apathy, tedium and monotony are about to draw to a close. Provocation being your remarks on democracy, which, military application or no, is going to give you letters to answer. By the bale. Good thing the army life has toughened you up. As to the remark about anyone throwing away old copies of STARTLING—you're kidding of course. Our readers never throw away old copies of SS. They just keep moving to bigger and better hice (plural of house.)

CONCERNING ENTOMOLOGY

by Maril Shrewsbury

Dear Sam: How can a person be made both very happy and very sad at the same time? It's easy, just read SS. Stories like MOTH AND RUST will make you glad, and black-bordered pronouncements like "We're going bi-monthly" will make you sad. Sniff, sniff. But if you gotta, I guess you gotta, and I will try to bear with you.

Aha, what have we here, a controversy? In TEV? Oh, joy! Nothing makes for better reading than a bunch of fans with their righteous indignation roused. Especially female-type fans. (Or should I say fen?) I personally am a firm believer in birth control, but I won't say so, I don't want the fen jumping on *me* like ducks on a june bug. And I don't think a girl or woman has to be neurotic to want to belong to an all-female club, some of the married women have husbands who don't take kindly to their wives belonging to mixed clubs, or writing to men-fen, and an all-female club is the only way they can actively participate in fandom. But I won't say so, I look too much like a june bug.

Bye now, Sam, and take care of those arteries.—*Box 1296 Aransas Pass, Texas, (Where They Bite Every Day)*

PS. If I get a check from the Aransas Pass Chamber of Commerce, I'll go halfers with you.

This "biting every day"—does it refer to fish or mosquitoes? Anyway, we left the plug in, lessee if the Chamber of Commerce bites. And what's wrong with my arteries?

LAMENT

by P. A. Engel

Dear Sam: I missed THE LOVERS! I didn't get to read THE LOVERS!! And, after reading both MOTHER and MOTH AND RUST, I'm darn glad I missed THE LOVERS. I never knew I was born under a lucky star, but escaping the original story, I *must* have been. What, I ask you, was so original and new about the theme of MOTH AND RUST? There have been many stories of pseudo-insect reproduction. As a fan of long-standing, from 1939, to be precise, I find myself seldom shocked or even surprised at anything in SF, but I have been both bored and disappointed by Farmer's works. I expect the howls to implode my ear-drums. Well, let them come, their opinions are worth as much to me as mine are to me. The opinions of others are often very interesting, and sometime shed a lot of light. Perhaps I missed the point of MOTH AND RUST by missing the LOVERS. I had thought, that sequels were complete stories in themselves, however.

Thanks for an otherwise swell mag. Why don't you give the gals some men to look at on the covers? Let's not be so selfish.—*Box 421, Brookings, S. D.*

We're going to sit this one out ourselves.

NO BOMBS PLEASE

by James B. Hardin
A/2c, 14 404 226

Dear Sam Mines: I find it my pleasure to write ye ed. a letter of sorts—'haps it will be one that won't give *anyone* ulcers, least of all yo.

First let me deliver a few tons 'o'egoobooot to the mag. How you manage to put forth such an uniformly fine zine I really couldn't say, but I hope you are able to continue. The trimmed edges *are* a vast improvement. Keep this up by all means. Then too there's this matter of a cover illo con mit all that printing spread across it. I have actually been able to put your best covers under Frame. Couldn't before because of the —(need I say mo!)

Your stories I like too. MATING TIME by Joseph Shallit was a good example of a woman using her wiles to get her way. Ah me, I certain can't blame her, for those particular circumstances warranted almost any measures. But then she probably wouldn't have gone through with her plan. Anyhow she was perfectly safe because the man wouldn't let a "Bug" have something he couldn't.

THE LOVERS also struck my fancy. I've read it three times and I see a different side to it each time. Funny how a story will affect one this way. Is it not? A very good story.

Now for one Miss Barbara Behrman. Let me tell you a thing or three. I agree with you. But let me tell one thing more. I like to call myself a fan, I keep telling myself I am anyhow. Therefore let me say some of the

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letters leave me slightly bewildered to say the least. Some of them are slightly silly. But since SCIENCE FICTION has such a wide variety o' fen, I guess we'll just have to suffer.

Now my dear Sam, you've heard my little story. Let me say this as I make exit, PLEASE print this. By the by, I answer all missives thrown my way, (with the exception of time bombs.) Yours science fictionally.—*Det. 1906-3 AACS Mtn. Home A.F.B., Idaho.*

You're only *slightly* bewildered?

KEEP YOUR POWDER DRY

by George W. Earley

Dear Sam: Thru a bit of luck I got a copy of THE LOVERS in Korea last year and was able to read it without having to listen to inane burblings by wet-nosed fans. After hearing all the hootin' and hollerin' everybody did over it, I read it a couple more times. I still stick to my original diagnosis—it's a NOTHING yarn. I suppose that the younger fans might get a thrill out of the sex in it—probably figured that now they could stop reading Mickey Spillane in the basement.

Being back in the States now where Stf is readily available, I risk two bits when I see the June SS with MOTH AND RUST—a sequel to THE LOVERS—blurbed on the cover. I WUZ ROBBED!!! (Sam, if I get to PhilCon II, I'm coming a' shootin'!) Oh, was this ish ever poor! First we find regrets that there ain't enuf good yarns to pub SS every month and then you stuff the thing full of cornballs that indicate you'd better pub it about once a year. Get on the BALL! Get GOOD stories. Get Hannes Bok to do a sequel to THE BLUE FLAMINGO! You might save the mag yet—but try, will ya!

As for those three shorter yarns—oh lordy, the stench was awful. I suppose next you'll run stories by Seibel?

(Question to Nancy Moore: Since when you stop liking GOSmith—GOSmith yarns, that is? I recall a certain Sunday in Cincinnati. . . . . .).

Print it, Sam—I want to see how many rabid fans come screaming for muh blood. EN GARDE, you all!—*507 Castle Drive, Apartment D, Baltimore 12, Maryland.*

There is a beaut of a gesture if I ever saw one. En garde, you all! He's taking on everybody. Good thing the next convention is in the city of brotherly love. If I see you there I will personally give you back your quarter. On second thought, why not send your copy of THE LOVERS to one of the six or seven million people screaming for it?

OF COARSE

by Frederick B. Christoff

Greetings and hulucinations: So now we have the sequel to THE LOVERS? So now everyone will write in and say it was very interesting but not as good as THE LOVERS. Which will prove how people lie in their teeth. (Strange phrase that) For MOTH and RUST puts the aformentioned joke to shame, not only in story plot but in the general writing of it.

In TL Farmer treated the sex and different situations with the attitude of "I know this sounds foolish but I can't think of any other way to say it," whereas in MandR it would appear that he gave the whole story a great deal of thought before writing a single word. This of coarse is only my opinion such as it is.

Despite the fact that M and R was very well received by this person it did not cop first place. The honour of that going to HERE WE LIE Oooops HERE LIE WE. This was a gem of a short story with a mood that you could get into and enjoy, but I don't see where you got the nerve to call it a novelet, but then you have enough nerve of your own without going out and looking for it re: your statement in TEV that you like intelligence. From this I conclude you don't like ignorance which means you don't like me. Now this is all right as far as I am concerned, but please don't say it in public like thaaaat.

Lots of warm discussions going on in TEV's pages. The females have their their their, well they have got something up over your remarks to MariAn Cox about her Fusterated Female Fannetts. Their own fault of coarse but they don't seem to realize it?

Birth control is getting a good thrashing over for some vague reason, Joe Keogh offered some very foolish and vague theories which would have been better unsaid.

As things now stand TEV is now made up of three discussions 1 Fanettes 2 Birth control 3 THE LOVERS. Perhaps you can dispose of this deplorable situation or do you like to make people suffer?

Oh well, I go. Good-by.—*93 Cameron St. South Kitchener Ont. Canada.*

You is overlooking something, kid. I don't write any letters to TEV, so nacherly, I don't pick the subjects to discuss. In fact I go through the letters with a currycomb, looking for brand-new subjects. Occasionally I invent one to toss in, though this is always done subtly and if asked right out loud in public, I would deny it like a Congressman.

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What do you mean HERE LIE WE was a short story? It was over ten thousand words and that's a novelet as I always heard it. Must have been a good story though, if it seemed short to you.

FAMILY CIRCLE
by Ted Hinds

Dear Sam: When I got hold of the June ish of STARTLING, I turned to the letter column as per usual, and read the letters, all of them. Then I went back and read Mary Corby's again. And again. The sum total of my opinion is this:

She has made a point. And very nicely, only when she started to look at it from the children's point of view, she failed to bring in a couple of important (I think) factors.

(1) Granted that a small family will not deflate the pocket-book so much as the large, a large family (taking her six children as the basis here) has a way of teaching children to get along without some of the really unnecessary things of life, things that the children may not get handed to them when they grapple with life by themselves. You know as well as I that Mother and Dad will not always be around to lend a hand when things get rough. The older children get an early start in learning responsibility, in a large family. And on long winter nights, sitting in front of the fireplace with the rest of the clan makes everyone there glad they are there. And since only about a third of a person's life is spent with his parents at the helm, my statement takes on even larger meaning.

(2) So with my statements above, I can conclude with *some* justification that while a small family will give the *child* a better life, the large family will give the *adult* a better life. And since one is an adult for about 2/3 of his/her life, it is self-evident which is better.

Q. E. D.

The reason for the effort of sending this is a desire that both sides of an issue be stated and defended. I have probably left out some of the benefits of a small family, but not many. Any comment written to me will be appreciated, since I am the challenger. And incidentally, I think that you, Sam, should step in with your opinion once in a while. You are entitled to an opinion. Aren't you????. —*Box 718, Ukiah, California.*

P. S. I agree whole-heartedly with the rest of Mary Corby's letter.

You want an opinion from me? Okay. I distrust *all* generalizations. What happens to any individual depends upon that individual more than anything else. Outside circumstances push him in one direction or another, but circumstances push some people further than others. So you will find an only child who may be better adjusted than one from a large family, even if your premise is true that the *tendency* is for children from larger families to be better adjusted. And I'm not yet sure it is true. Even where there is more than one child in a family parents have a favorite who gets more attention than the others; there is often a runt who gets the hand-me downs and leavings and there are the in-betweeners who are mostly ignored. So you have the same gamut of imbalance. And not every "only" child is spoiled.

Somebody ought to do a Kinsey on this problem.

THE PINOCHLE OF SUCCESS
by Carol McKinney

Dear Sam: Maybe twice a year there's a stf mag that reaches the mythical top. The stories are all excellent; moreover, there's not one that you have the slightest urge to pick at, to dissect, to give your views of how it should have been written. The constant urge to leap from one finished tale to a new, untried one is even partially sated. These mags just happen to you, and you don't know it until the last page hits you in the head.

(What am I leading up to?? Sam—you suspect an ulterior motive?? Ok, you knew it already anyway—)

Of the 93 stf mags (anybody want to get ambitious and check?) to appear since the Jan. ishs went on sale. THE JUNE 1953 SS IS AT *THE* TOP. Now if anybody wants to start a feud via TEV, Sam will be very glad to get his tin whistle out and polished up. Just tell, in 900 words or less, why *you* didn't like the June SS.

MOTH AND RUST—what can you say about a story like this??? I have no doubt that this will bring a greater deluge than the flood that happened to THE LOVERS; to find something different to say about it will be difficult. People are going to scream about "all that vile sex and shockingly described love scenes". What they said about THE LOVERS will be mild in comparison. "Oh! my dear!—those nauseatingly vivid descriptions in the dissecting room! I almost didn't make it into the—"

But Sam—I *liked* MOTH AND RUST! I said it and I'm glad. It *was* a much-better-than-average novel. (Must be something wrong with me—the dissecting room scenes

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Give Gladly

THE UNITED WAY

didn't drag a quiver out of my inner section. It was even very interesting to read about her revealed anatomy!)

Now, I'm not saying that MOTH AND RUST hit the absolute top. Say, the *almost* top. Like you rate movies **** and *****, and the lower ones *, **, and ***. Let's say that MOTH AND RUST was a **** novel. The only ones I've *ever* read in SS and TWS that hit ***** were BIG-PLANET, and the shorter story NO LAND OF NOD, although STAR OF WONDER was only ½* short. (Complicated???)

The other three stories this time lay somewhere between *** and ****, and written in a smooth style that really set the old imagination working overtime, especially THE BLACK DEEP THOU WINGEST.

So now we know why you did it Sam, why you waited till this ish to spring the saddening news that SS returns bi-monthly. You wanted to leave so many fond memories of this ish with us that they would ease all the tears of sorrow. And you didn't come out with a big black announcement on the contents page, you gave it to us quietly in a small box at the bottom of page 6, ensuring the double-take, the incredulous re-reading of the fateful words, the loud anguished screams. What else is there to say???—*385 No. 8th East St., Provo, Utah.*

We spent fifteen minutes trying to think up some way of disagreeing with her about how terrific we were and finally were forced to admit failure. No use, Carol, we've just got to admit you're right. NOTE: At this point we went out to lunch and when we got back, guess who was sitting in the editorial chair? Carol McKinney, all the way from Utah, cute, blonde and with a smile we should like to call to the attention of Virgil Finlay. Stand back, boys, she had a large husband with her and besides, by the time this appears in print she'll be back in Utah.

NOTICEABLE NOTORIETY
by (Miss) Fern Cobb

Dear Mr. Mines: I have recently become a science fiction fan, and have heard a great deal about you in the sf world. You are quite famous, it seems! Have read a few copies of SPACE STORIES, and STARTLING, enjoyed them both, especially the letter section. When it comes to complaints, some of those readers really sound off, my, my, such sarcasm! You handle them all so cleverly in your remarks.

Have noticed a great number of your readers write long letters, so hope this short one is worthy of notice. It's no masterpiece, but I do hope you will surprise me and publish it anyway.

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Please place the request in one of your mags sometime, that I would like to hear from fans and readers of SF in the Erie area.

Best wishes for continued success. Thanks a thousand for listenin' in.—*843 Priestly Ave., Lawrence Park, Erie, Pa.*

Erie isn't too far from Pittsburgh and there is a large and active science fiction group there. Write to Marion Mallinger, Pittsburgh Science Fiction Society, 734 Mellon Street, Pittsburgh 6, Pa. Unless you want to commute to New York or Chicago. . . . Or, look at:

TIMELY AND FUNNY

by Marie Louise & Nancy Share

Dear Mr. Mines: Enclosed find twenty dollars for the following advertisement. And while you search for it, may we have Fandom's attention?

We are about to launch on Fandom, a new and different type of fanzine. A Monthly, it will feature contests, marvelous artwork, a lengthy letter section, everything that the now defunct FANVARIETY possessed, and more. We intend to make it the BEST thing ever to hit fandom.

If anyone is interested, we need material. Not strictly SF or fantasy, although both will be considered. Our idea is to launch out into a hitherto neglected *general* field of amateur journalism. Timely articles, humor, short stories . . . . with a few requisites. Material must be well written, interesting, and not too lengthy. Anything submitted will be carefully considered, and if found unusable, conscientiously (sp?) returned.

If used, material will be neatly and pleasingly presented to readers, illustrated by Nancy. Is anyone interested? If so, contact us immediately, send material to Marie-Louise and Nancy Share at—*Post Office Box 31, Danville, Pennsylvania.*

We took the envelope apart section by section, and we got news for you, gals, that twenty bucks must have slipped through a crack or something. Please send another by return mail as the advertising department keeps calling us up every twenty minutes.

As usual, several thousand letters remain. Let's see whom we can mention, at least.

Franklin M. Dietz, Jr. says he has just read through all the issues of SS dating from the time we took over and opines that our editorial judgment stacks up. His address is 156 W. Main St., Kings Park, L.I., N.Y., if you want to fight. He also wants more novels by Hannes Bok. In-

[*Turn page*]

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gram McCallum, Box 29, Appin, Ontario is mad at Vernon McCain for calling Ray Bradbury a hack. (He was kidding, Ing—heavy satire.) Bill Peck, 1041 W. Agarita, San Antonio 1, Texas, has given up the Camel 30 day test and is devoting himself to SS, also wants to announce the TEXCON for the Labor Day weekend for them as can't get to Philly—write Flavio Trevino, 623 E. Adams, Brownsville, Texas. Bill also wants to sell some back numbers at 10c per copy, send for list.

John Truax, 1102 9th St., Rapid City, S. Dakota loved MOTH AND RUST, thinks it needs a sequel. Help! Edward Wood, 31 N. Aberdeen St., Chicago, 7, Ill. resents MOTH AND RUST and other taboo-breaking stories and announces he is parting company with us. Joe Keogh, 63 Glenridge Ave., St. Catharines, Ont., glooms about SS's bimonthly schedule, says TEV will be too far behind the times. Stephani Szold likes stories like THE BLACK DEEP and HERE LIE WE better than stories like THE LOVERS. Also likes our editorials and still thinks SS is the best pulp (what's that?) in the field. She's at Box 1529, Woman's College, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, N. C.

Frank Lewis, Box 62, Mesa, Arizona, says stop encouraging the gals—they're ruining TEV and it's all our fault. Next thing we'll need a fashion editor, he says. Ernie Mesle, Jr., 11831 E. Lesser St., Norwalk, Cal., says he was a devotee of our "slick" competition but lately finds himself getting fed up with "depth" sans entertainment. Pfc. Mike Salovesh, Station Complement, 8027th Army Unit, APO #40, c/o Postmaster, San Francisco, Cal., wants to know how fans can become authors. Why, by writing stories, Mike. You gotta send them to editors, that's the only catch. But try it.

Hank Moskowitz, Three Bridges, N.J., still likes Farmer. Burton K. Beerman, Grove School, Madison, Conn., wants us to raise our price to 35c, snarls at Vernon McCain for criticising Farmer, says MOTH AND RUST is the best story to appear in SS since he has been reading it. Sid Sullivan, G.P.O., Jacksonville, Fla., applauds MOTH AND RUST. Theresa H. Dowling, 1819 E. 29th St., Baltimore, Md., says she shouldn't argue because she is too opinionated, but she sure does. M.

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Desmond Emery, 93 Hemlock Street, St. Thomas, Ont., liked NO LAND OF NOD better than THE LOVERS. Richard Henderson, 231 Garden Lane, Decatur, Georgia, liked Merwin's CENTAURUS, also LORDS OF THE MORNING—wants to know if Hamilton is new in stf. Huh? New?

Daryl Sharp RCAF Greenwood, Nova Scotia, Canada, wants us to go slick, on account of having such good stories, the mags should match.

Val Walker, 6438 E. 4th Pl., Tulsa, Okla., thought MOTH AND RUST terrific, if not quite as terrific as THE LOVERS. Also thinks Tom Pace writes the best letters in TEV. Robert Leigh No. 406, 1660 N. Western Ave., Hollywood 27, Cal., could use some magazines for the veterans hospital. The University of Chicago Science Fiction Club is organizing an auto pool for the Philadelphia convention. Write to Evan H. Appelman, 133 Laurel Ave., Highland Park, Ill. if you live in that area and want to go to Philly. Robert R. Hazlett, Sam Houston Courts, Apt. 7, Huntsville, Tex., wants copy of SS with THE LOVERS—still think TEV is a waste of space, Bob? Gerald A. Steward, 166 McRoberts Ave., Toronto 10, Ont., wants to sell his collection of SS, TWS, FSM and WSA in mint condition.

Hilda R. Watts, 712 N. Division Street, Salisbury, Maryland was baffled by the June cover, wants to know what it was. We're not sure, Hilda, but we can tell you what Phil Farmer thought it was. He thought it was the brain picking machine described in MOTH AND RUST. Okay? Pat E. Lewis thinks the women are ruining the mag—just from one woman to the others. J. Martin Graetz thinks we are Graetz, but won't come out and say so because he wants you to read his fanzine FRAMP. Write him at 307 So. 52nd Street, Omaha 3, Nebraska. Got to go now, sorry we couldn't get 'em all in. next time, maybe more.

—The Editor

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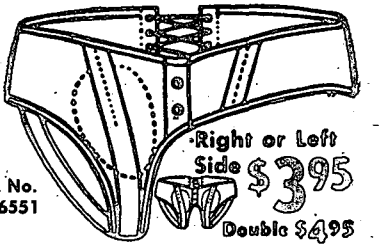

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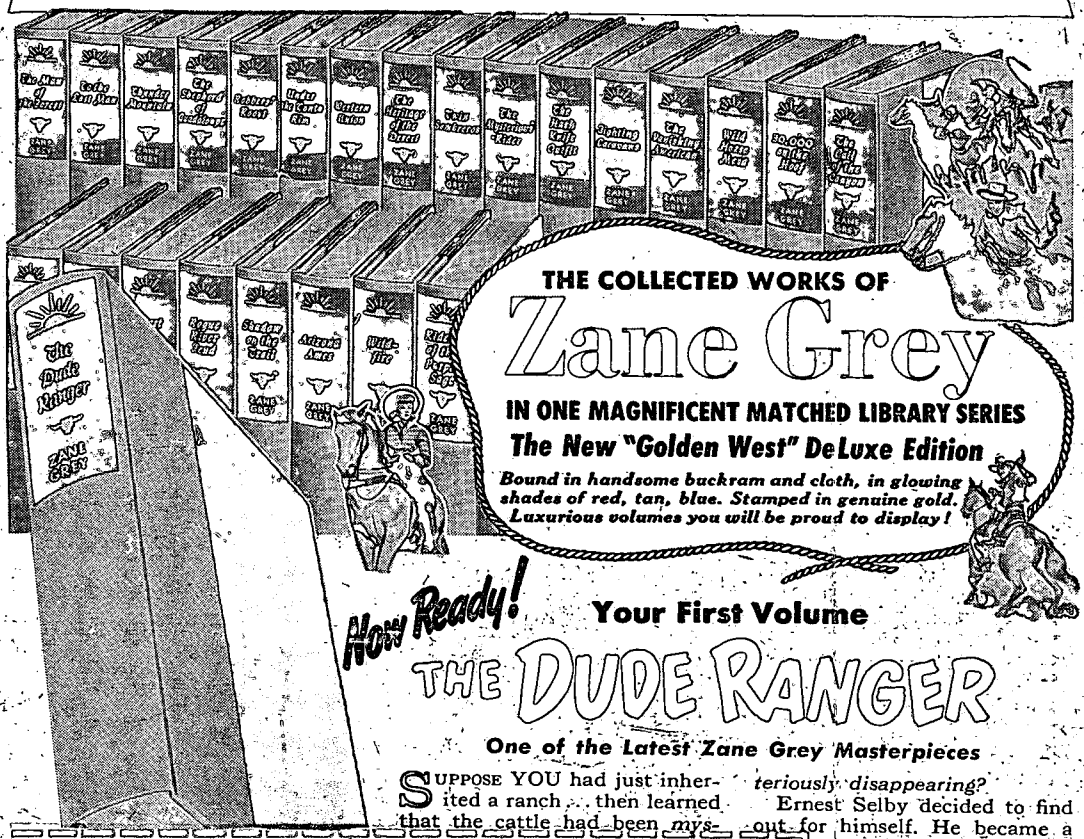

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